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January 18, 2017

THE Christian CENTURY

Thinking Critically, Living Faithfully



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The Christian century

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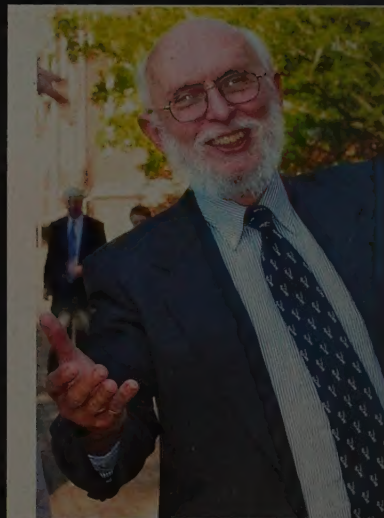
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Have you heard **DAVID BARTLETT** talking with Matt Fitzgerald about liberal Christians and the Bible?

MATT FITZGERALD: Do you feel a pull in liberal Protestant churches toward a post-Christian religiosity?

DAVID BARTLETT: I sense that the Bible is a nostalgic part of our past instead of a vital resource for the present. Nobody ever got up one day and said, "I have to get away from the Bible." We just drifted. In the liberal Protestant churches where I've been, religious experience has been pretty good, but the Bible has been pretty thin. Those things aren't mutually exclusive. We ought to bring our experience to church and learn to read it through the Bible.



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From the publisher

Peter W. Marty

Identity search

When George Bush Sr. was campaigning for president, he made a stop at a North Carolina nursing home. When he came upon an elderly gentleman bent over in his wheelchair, Bush leaned over to ask, "Sir, do you know who I am?" The man looked up and responded, "No, but if you go to the nurses station, they can tell you." I have no idea if the president-to-be followed up on the man's suggestion and, if he did, what identity some nurse assigned him. But the story opens the door to remembering the many ways in which all of us search for identity during the course of our lives.

Identity quests are not reserved for the lost, the odd, and the weak. All we have to recall is Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who in his own centered and faith-filled life wrestled with identity questions, expressed in his poem, "Who Am I?"

For some people, identity questions revolve around appearance, social acceptance, or vocational discernment. For others, it's economic status or the anxieties accompanying relationships. For still others, questions of gender identity loom large.

If you aren't acquainted with any transgender people, I think you'll find the stories in this issue of the CENTURY enlightening. Transgender identity is one of many issues that we at the CENTURY believe are too important to leave in the realm of ignorance or misperception. In covering this often overlooked population, we are not aiming to offer a version of a narrow identity politics that ends up perpetuating a group's marginalization.

In thinking about interpretive handholds for reflecting on gender identity, I'd begin with the recognition that gender is exceedingly complex. When it comes to the mind and spirit working within the particulars of a human body, the rich mysteries of God are deeper than anyone can fathom. Gender spectrum cases will continue to make news. (See stories of South African Olympic track star Caster Semenya for an example of the complexity.)

My second claim would be that there is a dignity about existence itself. To be created by God is to know that we are beautiful and important and that we are charged to help each other live the capacities God has planted in us. As the psalmist reminds us, we are "fearfully and wonderfully made . . . intricately woven in the depths of the earth." That would be *all* of us.

My third claim would be that part of Christian responsibility is to give voice to those whose voices haven't been heard or are easily ignored. Though only a small percentage of adults in the United States are transgender (0.6 percent in a Williams Institute study), their perspectives matter.

Finally, for Christians, discussions of individual gender identity need to include but go beyond personal rights to acknowledge that we are formed by others, shaped by community, and secured within the hand of God. When people approached John the Baptist one day to inquire, "Who are you?" John could only answer by speaking of being in relation to Jesus. Our task is to live our gendered lives in such a way that those lives would not make sense if the Lord did not exist.

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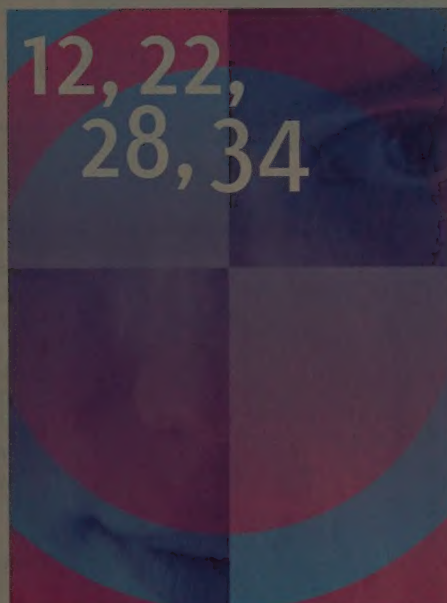
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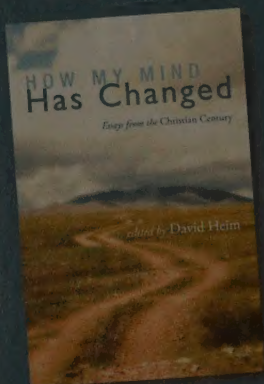
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HOW MY MIND HAS CHANGED

Essays from
the *Christian*
Century



Thirteen prominent
Christian theologians
speak of their
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and of the questions
that have shaped
their writing and
scholarship.

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LETTERS

Refugee work

Thanks to Amy Frykholm for the article about refugees settling into Montana ("Welcome to Missoula," Dec. 21). It was sharp, honest, and suggestive of what good can happen.

Members of our family in a small town in northern Austria are working with a Muslim refugee family to help the children learn German and English in order to get into good schools. It is both simple and hard work.

Philip Blackwell
Whitewater, Wis.

Good News Bible ("A Bible for everyone?" Dec. 21). Fea brought back fond memories of the paperback "two-bit Bible" that cost only a quarter for a college student watching his pennies. That low price and Annie Vallotton's drawings encouraged reading with ballpoint pen in hand and writing reflections and questions in the margins. I still go back to that version when pondering different translations to use for a sermon. It has been part of this baby boomer's spiritual pilgrimage.

Hank Simon
Odenton, Md.

Philosophical well-being . . .

Robert Westbrook's review of Sarah Bakewell's *At the Existentialist Café* ("I choose, therefore I am," Dec. 21) catches the joy and philosophical soundness of the book. It is stimulating to explore philosophical ideas that connect with life. We are well acquainted with the anxiety and ambiguity associated with existentialism, so it's a joy when Bakewell describes Maurice Merleau-Ponty as a person with a "glow of well-being emanating from him . . . Ideas are interesting, but people are vastly more so." This theme is well expressed throughout the book.

Existentialism reaches beyond European thinkers to touch a world that needs the authenticity it offers. As Westbrook reminds us, "authentic action grows out of situated freedom."

John Wallace
Columbus, Ohio

Exaggerated . . .

Your article on Sarah Coakley was an embarrassment ("Theology through prayer," Nov. 23). Such preciousness and exaggeration I have never seen in real journalism.

Daniel Meeter
Brooklyn, N.Y.

God and gangs . . .

I read with great interest "God Among the gangs" (Nov. 23), by Philip Jenkins, having gone to El Salvador three times and been alerted to the dangers of gangs. The gangs are real, but the people I met and worked with have faith, hope, and love as I seldom encounter in the States. They greatly appreciate and desperately want U.S. citizens to continue to come to shop, to help build decent homes, and to worship with them. Please tell more stories about the church in El Salvador.

Kathy Hauelsen
Houston, Tex.

Inexpensive good news . . .

Thank you for John Fea's retrospective on the 50th anniversary of the

January 18, 2017

Lament for Aleppo

Laments for Aleppo and for the millions of Syrians caught in civil war frequently include complaints about inaction by the West, especially by the United States. Surely, critics say, the United States could have done more to stop the greatest humanitarian catastrophe of the 21st century, in which a half million people have been killed, another half million have been wounded or gone missing, and 14 million people have been displaced.

There is no doubt that for six years Syrian leader Bashar al-Assad has waged a brutal war against his own people. His signature methods were on display in the siege of Aleppo, where government forces used chlorine gas and indiscriminate barrel bombs on rebel troops, resulting in hundreds of civilian deaths. Until Assad's troops gained control of eastern Aleppo in mid-December, civilians were cut off from food, water, and medical supplies.

Yet those denouncing inaction have never outlined a convincing alternative to what the United States and its allies have done—which is primarily to urge the warring parties toward a cease-fire and to lobby for humanitarian relief. The proposals for more forceful intervention have had only a slight chance of success and could easily make the situation worse. Doing something is not always better than doing nothing.

It's been argued, for example, that the United States could do more to back the rebel troops fighting Assad. But U.S. leaders are rightly wary of supporting Islamist jihadi groups whose methods and goals are as brutal as Assad's and whose dominance would bring a host of new problems. It's also been recommended that Western forces could establish safe zones for civilians. But without trusted and significant forces on the ground to provide security, a designated safe zone could easily become a killing zone. It's been proposed that the United States could use air power to enforce a no-fly zone. But with Iran and Russia firmly backing Assad, and with Turkey more worried about Kurdish forces than Assad's, it's not certain that any American military pressure—short of a heavy investment of troops—can alter the dynamic of power on the ground.

A measure of the poor options available is the situation for Christians in Syria: they view the brutal Assad as their protector against Sunni Muslim extremists. Whatever qualms they may have about Assad's methods, Syrian Christians are relieved that it's Assad's troops, not Sunni fighters, that now control Aleppo.

The lack of a plausible strategy for transforming the military situation by no means rules out a humane response. Groups such as Doctors Without Borders, the Syrian American Medical Society, and the Syrian volunteer group White Helmets are working heroically on the ground to relieve suffering and rebuild individual lives, and they could use financial donations. A wide range of faith groups have partnered as the Multifaith Alliance for Syrian Refugees to help those on the front lines who are enduring injury and trauma. These and other agencies are bringing some light to a dark time. Sometimes that—along with lament and prayer—is all that humans can do.

Those denouncing inaction have never outlined a convincing alternative.

CENTURY marks

LIFE RAFT: In the summer of 2015, Jim Estill of Guelph, Ontario, focused intent-ly on the refugee crisis developing from Syria's civil war. Without telling his wife or friends about his plans, he figured out that he could sponsor 50 refugee families for a year at a cost of \$1.5 million—an amount he could afford. Enlisting community support, he brought 58 families to Canada, finding them homes and giving them jobs. He bought a store for one man and financed a building project to provide more housing. "I didn't want to be 80 years old and know that I did nothing during the greatest humanitarian crisis of my time," Estill said. He is the CEO of Danby, an appliance company with annual sales of \$400 million (*Toronto Life*, December 20).

CHRISTMAS SCENE: Three weeks before Christmas, the San Antonio Mennonite Church tore down its nativity scene to make room for an influx of immigrants being discharged from a local detention center. The pastor joked

that the church replaced its fake nativity scene with a real one. The church has a guest house that houses eight people and is frequently used for short-term housing for immigrants. In the first week the church housed up to 500 women and children, most of them escaping violence in Central America. The church put down air mattresses and space heaters in the fellowship hall, sanctuary, hallways, and Sunday school rooms to accommodate the immigrants (*Mennonite World Review*, December 12).

PRO-LIFE: The Delaware Supreme Court struck down the state's capital punishment system and ruled that the 12 men on Delaware's death row will get a sentence of life in prison without parole instead of the death penalty. Some members of the legislature vowed to reinstate the death penalty, but it is not clear whether they have enough support. The governor-elect said he'd probably veto the law if it reached his desk (*Delaware Public Media*, December 15).

STAGE RELIEF: Academy Award-winning actor Viola Davis was born in a one-room sharecropper's shack on a former plantation in South Carolina. Her family moved to Rhode Island in search of employment for her father, a racehorse groom. Lunch at school was at times her main meal. She and her siblings scoured dumpsters for food or depended on handouts from friends. Sometimes she stole. She slept with rags wrapped around her neck to keep rats from biting her. Davis says one never gets over the trauma of a childhood like that, yet she has found acting a release for her anguish (*New Yorker*, December 19 and 26).

OCCASION FOR HOPE: Funerals and memorial services function more and more as celebrations of life and a time to remember the deceased. Pastors need to remind families that a Christian funeral is a worship service, not a birthday party without the honored guest. "The Christian funeral is one of the richest plots a pastor can till—if we keep our hand to the plow," says Noah Livingston, pastor at Abbe Reformed Church in Clymer, New York. "Few other settings come primed to confess our hope with such clarity and grit." Livingston encourages his congregants to attend funerals, even for people they don't know well, and he tries to schedule them at times when working people can attend (*Christianity Today*, December).

BARE HEAD: After the 2013 Boston Marathon bombing, Nassrene Elmadhun, a Muslim doctor in Boston, found herself increasingly the subject of hostile stares, despite the fact that she's lived in the United States her whole life. The year 2015 was a turning point for her. It was the year Donald Trump called for a ban on all Muslims entering the country and when hate crimes against Muslims went up 67 percent, according to the FBI.



"Is that a good thing or a bad thing?"

Elmadhun then made the agonizing decision to stop wearing the hijab in public. Although she feels safer without the Muslim headdress, she's "sad about what it means about our religious freedoms in general in our country" (*The Christian Science Monitor*, December 20).

DECREASED USE: Teen use of many substances hit an all-time low in 2016, according to a set of data that has been collected for the past 42 years. This was true in the case of heroin, methamphetamines, inhalants, and stimulants, as well as alcohol and cigarettes. Misuse of prescription opioids among 12th-graders has also gone down in the last five years, even though there has been increased use in the general population. Teen experimentation with e-cigarettes peaked in 2015 and was down in 2016, but marijuana use, at least among 12th-graders, was up (*Science News*, December 13).

REST OF THE STORY: Public statuary can be read like a book, says Rebecca Solnit, writer and activist, although such works often conceal as much as they reveal. Throughout the South, monuments celebrate the Confederacy as if the South won the Civil War, but they ignore slavery and the Jim Crow era. Western states have statues that remember the pioneers and the heroes of the Indian wars but show no awareness of the pain caused to Native Americans by westward expansion. Solnit thinks a fuller story must be told. In Montgomery, Alabama, a memorial is being built to remember the 4,000 black victims of lynching (*Harper's*, January).

MORMON "WIKILEAKS": In October Ryan McKnight of Las Vegas posted on YouTube a series of inside conversations between senior leaders of the Mormon Church. Responding to popular demand, he subsequently launched a secure website—a WikiLeaks for Mormons—where people could post internal documents or videos about the Mormon Church, which is known for its secrecy. McKnight got widespread media notice in 2015 for calling attention to a memo that updated the Mormon hand-

“Is there literally nothing that can shame you?”

— **Samantha Power**, U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, speaking to delegates from Russia, Syria, and Iran about the bombing of the Syrian city of Aleppo (*Independent*, December 14)

“In the event of a war, a major terrorist attack or large-scale riots or protests—all of which are entirely possible—a president with authoritarian tendencies and institutions that have come unmoored could pose a serious threat to American democracy.”

— **Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt**, professors of government at Harvard University (*New York Times*, December 16)

book, declaring members in same-sex unions to be apostates and refusing blessings or baptisms of their offspring until age 18, and then only if they disavowed same-sex marriage (*Washington Post*, December 20).

FORESTS TO FAUCETS: Since the early 1900s the number of trees per forested acre in California has gone from fewer than 50 to over 300. The extra timber makes forest fires more severe, and it is worsening the California drought. One conservationist compares it to “too many straws in a glass.” The trees suck water out of the ground before it gets a chance to run off into the streams that feed reservoirs. Global warming makes the trees even thirstier. Current tree thinning projects, resisted by some environmentalists, could increase water runoff by 10 to

40 percent, forestry experts estimate (*Economist*, December 17).

OPEN HOUSE: Art restorers toiling on the sumptuous 500-year-old apartments of Pope Alexander VI are rediscovering the work of Bernardino di Betto, a Renaissance master who painted frescoes in numerous Italian churches. Better known as Pinturicchio, the 15th-century artist worked on the apartments of the controversial Spanish pope, formerly known as Rodrigo Borgia. Pope Alexander is less known for his interest in arts and science than for his lusty affairs and blatant nepotism. When he died in 1503, the rooms were sealed off by his successor Pope Pius III, effectively closing the door on one of the more controversial pontificates. The apartments remained closed for more than 400 years (RNS).

GENDER GAP

SOURCE: PEW RESEARCH CENTER

The most highly educated religious groups have the smallest gender gaps between MEN and WOMEN in average years of schooling.*

(See news story on p. 14)



*Based on adults age 25 years and older

A fair deal for food workers

JOSE OLIVA IS the codirector of the Food Chain Workers Alliance, which aims to improve wages and working conditions for “all workers across the food chain.” The FCWA recently helped develop a Good Food Purchasing Policy, a set of standards that emphasizes local economies, sustainable production, fair treatment of workers, animal welfare, and nutrition. These standards have been adopted in Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Oakland. Oliva lives in Chicago.

How did you get interested in the connections between food, justice, and workers’ rights?

My family are refugees from Guatemala. After arriving in the United States, my family and a few other families started an organization called Casa Guatemala for mutual support. I was a volunteer in the organization.

One day in 1999, a woman in Chicago contacted Casa to say that her husband had been kidnapped. I assumed she was talking about her husband in Guatemala. But she said no, he had been kidnapped in Chicago. She said that he was a day laborer at *la parada* and someone picked him up for a job, but he never came home. I felt like she was speaking Greek. I didn’t know what *la parada* was, and I didn’t know what a day laborer was.

What is *la parada*?

It’s the name for a street corner in Chicago where day laborers gather in the morning in hopes that an employer will offer them a job for that day.

What happened in that case?

We ended up working closely with the Chicago Interfaith Committee on Worker Issues—it is now called ARISE Chicago—

and with the Civil Rights Division of the FBI. They found out that there was one guy that everyone called “the Chino” who would pick people up from the street corner and then sell them to a series of restaurants. The FBI staked out the restaurant and busted the whole ring.

For me, it was an important moment. I felt like I had inadvertently picked up a rock and now I could see all the little grubs underneath. I saw an underground economy, and I found it almost unbelievable that there were folks willing to engage in criminal activity to this degree in the United States. But it also became clear to me that this was not an isolated incident.

What are the conditions of this underground economy?

Labor has become more commodified: you sell a specific unit of labor. Instead of working 40 hours for one employer who pays your health-care insurance and gives you some benefits, you might be an Uber driver or work in three restaurants.

Have you seen this economy close up?

I worked in the restaurant industry the whole time I was in college. Guatemalan refugees who came in the 1980s were not granted political asylum. The State Department denied that anything was happening in Guatemala that made people need asylum.

I was undocumented for 24 years. I went to high school, but once I graduated I couldn’t go to a four-year university, because I couldn’t get scholarships or grants. Eventually I finished my degree by working at restaurants and paying for credit hours as I went. That gave me a worm’s eye view.

PHOTO BY ZOE SULLIVAN



When I began to organize with the Interfaith Committee, it wasn’t just an intellectual interest. I had worked in the industry. I knew what it was like to be exploited.

Workers face a particular challenge in this fragmented, underground economy. What do you see as the future for unions in this context?

I don’t think we yet know fully how to intervene in this economy. There are new modes of production and new populations of workers—immigrants and women. Whereas at the start of the 20th century, there was a vast consolidation of workers into huge factories, today the workforce is atomized, with Uber drivers and bike messengers as examples.

But just as craft unions didn’t go away when industrial unions formed, I don’t think you will see the end of unions. But we are going to need new forms of collective bargaining. There are things like online forums where, for example, Uber drivers can all get together. That fosters thinking that we can talk and work together even if we are not in the same place. There is an increased role for coalitions over all. And this is the place where faith groups and community groups are central to coalition building.

How did this work lead you to the Restaurant Opportunities Center?

After the incident with the day laborer, I started working for the Restaurant Opportunities Centers. It was a place where I felt I could see the bigger picture.

ROC was born out of the attacks of September 11. Seventy-three workers died at the World Trade Center in a restaurant called Windows on the World. The rest of the workers there founded ROC as a tribute to those 73, vowing that they would make the restaurant industry better.

We noticed at ROC that there is a growing awareness of food and food systems at every level of society. Some people are concerned about what food does to the human body; some are concerned about what food does to the environment; others focus on how food and food access affects communities. But nobody was talking about the workers in all this—the people who actually produce, transport, sell, and serve food.

How many workers are we talking about?

There are over 20 million workers in the food system. It is the largest private sector employer in the United States. It's bigger than health care.

These workers are the lowest-paid in the country, and none of them has a clear ladder for improving their conditions.

This system of workers needs a unified organization. It can't be restaurant workers over here and farmworkers over there and meat and poultry processors in another place. We needed to bring all of those sectors together into one coalition. That's what led to the creation of the Food Chain Workers Alliance in 2008.

What's its mission?

When we started the alliance, our mandate was to insert workers into this discourse about food. At first we urged people who were working on food issues to talk about workers. But then we realized the truth of the African proverb: "Anything about us without us isn't for us."

Now we are making workers themselves a part of the conversation. Consider the issue of food waste. Food waste is the third-largest source of carbon emissions on earth. Workers and working conditions need to be part of this conversation—and now they are, thanks, in part at least, to our efforts.

We also wanted to create a tool that would help organizations, municipalities, and other entities connect the dots of the food system. It took us a long time to

think how to do this. Eventually we landed on the Good Food Purchasing Policy, which sets standards in five categories: environmental sustainability, worker fairness, animal welfare, local economies, and health. Each of these values is weighted equally. By these standards, it's not enough for a company to have great environmental practices; it also needs to treat workers fairly.

After being adopted by the city of Los Angeles in 2012, the GFPP was adopted by the LA Unified School District, which serves 650,000 meals a day. Now the district has to consider all five of these values when they purchase food. Before the only criteria was it had to be the cheapest.

What is your ultimate goal with the Good Food Purchasing Policy?

We want a food procurement process in every city in the United States that requires companies to change their practices. The movement is about increasing the good rather than penalizing the bad.

Have you seen any evidence that companies' practices are changing to meet the standards?

In LA, there was a very strenuous process with the poultry producer Tyson. The school district was convinced that Tyson was the only company that could supply the huge quantity of chicken that it needed. But Tyson was unable or maybe unwilling to turn over its books to the Center for Good Food Purchasing (goodfoodcities.org), the third-party verifier and the central hub for the national work. Tyson kept lobbying for an exception. The school district held its ground, because GFPP was the law.

What kind of information from companies is needed?

We need to know if Tyson plants have OSHA violations and other labor and employment law violations; we need to know where the chicken being supplied comes from and how is it transported. Because it was unwilling to answer those questions, Tyson is no longer one of the providers of chicken to the LA Unified School District, which was their second-largest contract. GFPP is now implemented in San Francisco and Oakland as well, and we are close to reaching agreements in Chicago, Cincinnati, and New York. **CC**

—Amy Frykholm

California ginkgos

The palms on Allen Avenue never condescend
to throw out a low branch for perching birds

or shade the muscled workers trimming hedges,
skimming edgers along lush San Marino lawns.

Aligned in stately colonnades, the palms keep
nothing but complacency in their tasseled heads

even in November, when the scruffy ginkgos
beneath, weary of the California sun,

have the good sense to let their leaves,
fanned like a thousand open hands, turn

yellow and drop to the ground in rough
blankets of courage, messy assertions

of the need, now and then, to die.

Debra Rienstra

Permeable savior

by Julie Morris

I GREW UP in a small Christian and Missionary Alliance congregation, where my father was the pastor. My mother took her roles as mother and pastor's wife seriously and demonstrated sincere faithfulness to God and family. One of the ways this care manifested was in the attention she gave to grooming and dressing her three young children.

While this effort went without a hitch for my older sister and brother, it was a continual battle with me. My mother, who had been raised with a clear sense of what was proper, wanted me to wear a dress to church. This wasn't a shallow fashion preference: she believed there was deep meaning in how you dress and

comport yourself in public, and she wanted me to receive the love and respect I deserved. Despite wanting to respect my mother and demonstrate my love for her, I could not stomach wearing a dress.

I still struggle to articulate the feeling I had as a child in wearing a dress. I suppose it was something akin to shame: this was not who I was. On Sunday mornings, I would often put a dress on hoping to appease my mother, but inevitably the sensation of "not right" overwhelmed me, and I would tear it off. I felt conflicted, and my mother was confounded. Why such an explosive reaction to something as simple as wearing a dress?

What I understand now but could not articulate then is that the dress was not just a piece of clothing. There were expectations that accompanied it—assumptions about what it meant to be a girl and expectations about how I should act. I knew that I was not that kind of girl, but I also knew I was not a boy. This was probably the precursor to my frustration with the gender binary. If I did not fit within these traditional categories, how many others were also struggling in this liminal space?

We need an account of gender that can open up spaces for people rather than closing them down. As a young girl in the church, I often experienced Jesus as the theological legitimization of what I could not do (for example, be a pastor, lead, etc.). But what if Jesus could do just the opposite? What if Jesus could open up expressions of gender rather than boxing them in?

Worm under the sun

A nightcrawler has found itself marooned,
Surrounded unexpectedly by sidewalk.
Night rain caused it to move (as earthworms do)
Up to the surface, then across slick grass,

Picking up speed—until the surface changed
From slick, wet grass to concrete, where it stopped.
Now, in a clearing sky, the sun keeps climbing.
Worms breathe through skin that must stay moist to breathe.

What kind of world plays pointless tricks like this?
A worm won't ask; nor will it formulate
Hopes likely nothing but more vanities.
This worm will be a worm and simply wait.

Most people marching toward the day don't notice.
The ones who do—their time is worth too much
To spend saving a worm. Some child might try,
If only the right child would happen by.

Charles Hughes

When I began to study sex, gender, and masculinity in the biblical world, I found that in many ways Jesus confounded notions of gender. According to Matthew's account of his lineage, he lacked a paternally inherited X or Y chromosome. Envisioned as the New Adam, Jesus was patterned after the androgynous first human. Furthermore, medieval theologians imagined the wound in Jesus' side as a womb in which he held all people.

One of the most striking examples of Jesus complicating gender categories happens in his encounter with the hemorrhaging woman (Mark 5:25–29). At the beginning of this story it seems that one of the main characters is clearly male and the other is clearly female. As the story progresses, however, the gender

markers of the characters become more complex. In order to understand this blurring of boundaries between Jesus and the bleeding woman, we must enter the first-century mind-set.

In the first century, the body's vulnerability to disease was a gendered

It is easy for us to praise the woman for her bravery and miss the fact that after the healing she is terrified. She seems to know that she has transgressed gender boundaries and threatened the masculinity of Jesus' body. But Jesus does not chastise her or reproach her for

in keeping things in flux, who is willing to be leaky and permeable, and who holds the possibility of all sexes and genders within his own body.

The point here is not that Jesus is male or female or effeminate. Rather, it is that his body does not fit into such categories and will not submit to them. Blurring the lines with his own body, Jesus precludes the theological justification for placing others into categories in ways that negate or ignore their own voice. We are then compelled to relate to people rather than categorize them, acknowledging their right to narrate their own identity and rejoicing in the fact that gender expression is but one of the ways we can witness the wonderful creativity of our Creator.

That's hope for me. That's saving. Through Jesus' body, we receive possibility and relationship. Whether or not we're wearing a dress. CC

In responding to the woman suffering from hemorrhages, Jesus blurs some notions of gender.

reality. Females were perceived as porous, lacking boundaries between the body and the exterior world, which left them susceptible to illness. The fact that women menstruated monthly demonstrated their inability to control their body or protect it from external forces. In short, a leaking body was a feminine body, an inferior body.

In Mark's story, the woman who approaches Jesus in the crowd has been bleeding for 12 years, so she fits squarely into the category of *feminine* as she approaches Jesus. Not only is she bleeding, she is perpetually bleeding and has no control over it. Female bodies were already perceived as weaker and inferior, and this woman's leaking, porous body would have been considered inferior even to other females.

When she touches the fringe of Jesus' cloak, something unexpected happens. New Testament scholar Candida Moss notes that the Greek phrase normally translated as "the power *went out of him*" could also be translated as "the power *leaked out of him*." In other words, Jesus' body becomes leaky, porous, and permeable—like that of a woman's.

For Jesus' body to begin leaking when a leaky woman touches him is a blatantly feminizing act. Furthermore, it is a *female* who exerts power over a male body, extracting healing from him. The alignment of Jesus' body with this feminine, bleeding body is quite scandalous.

stepping outside traditional gender roles. Quite the opposite. Not only does he tell her to go in peace, but he commends her act—one that transgresses accepted gender roles—as an act of faith.

Jesus' encounter with the bleeding woman reveals a savior who is interested

Lazarus

Fishers of men

Because you found me somewhere in-between,
Because you realized the truth of that,
You pulled me up. The not-seen was now seen—

Like something that's half-buried, serpentine,
A vine the wind has covered, dust unset—
Because you found me. Somewhere in-between,

The insects covered me in celebration,
And God began to pull, from where He sat.
You pulled me too. The not-seen was now seen:

The end-result a case of God-confusion.
Because who else could do a thing like that?
Because you found me somewhere in-between,

God stepped aside, for you, and it was done.
And so the grave-clothes, and your welcome mat.
Pull me up. The not-seen was now seen.

Who would have thought? The son in imitation:
And I come stumbling out into the sunlight.
Because you found me somewhere in-between,
You pulled me up, like roots, as was foreseen.

Kim Bridgford

Julie Morris is a doctoral candidate at Duke Divinity School.

Christians among higher educated, though not in U.S.

The first-ever global study of religion and education shows that Jews are more highly educated than any other religious group, while Hindus and Muslims are the least educated.

Jews go to school for 13 years on average, and Muslims and Hindus for six years, according to the recently released report from the Pew Research Center. Christians are the second-highest educated religious group in the world, with an average of nine years of education, followed by the religiously unaffiliated, and then Buddhists. (See graph on p. 9.)

The study shows vast gaps among religious groups in educational attainment. But education levels globally are rising for all faith groups.

"Even those groups that are relatively disadvantaged are making considerable progress across generations," said Conrad Hackett, the study's lead researcher. "That's a story of hope if you consider getting more education to be a good thing."

These global findings differ from data for the United States, where Muslims and Hindus are often better educated than the Christian majority. As in many countries, highly educated minorities have been welcomed and often have the means to migrate. In the United States, 96 percent of Hindus and 54 percent of Muslims hold a college degree, compared to 36 percent of Christians.

Globally, Hindus and Muslims "have made the biggest educational gains in recent generations," the Pew report concludes. While the oldest generation of Muslims studied has 3.5 years of schooling and the oldest Hindu generation has four years, the youngest for both religions has seven.

Among the poorly educated, there is a gender gap, though it is shrinking. Hindu women rank at the very bottom of the

study, but in the youngest generation there is a two-year difference between men and women in years of schooling, compared to three for the oldest generation.

While the overall global picture is one of progress, it also reveals educational poverty.

"The global norm is barely more than a primary education—an average of about eight years of formal schooling for men and seven years for women," the report concludes.

Education is highly correlated with religion. Four in ten Hindus and more than one-third of Muslims have no formal schooling, while one in ten Buddhists and only one in a hundred Jews lack any education. The factors driving these disparities include differing attitudes toward education within religious groups and their various distribution among societies where education is compulsory and val-

ued. Some scholars have argued that the work of Christian missionaries has had a positive effect on education levels.

As for the particularly high level of educational attainment among the world's 13 million Jews, "there's a culture of literacy that predates modernity," said Steven M. Cohen, a professor of Jewish social policy at Hebrew Union College who advised the Pew researchers on the study. Jewish tradition has demanded literacy from its adherents, at least among men, and not just its religious leaders.

"Jews need to learn Hebrew in order to pray—they need to pray from a prayer book," Cohen said. "Jewish prayer services are just much more participatory. They require more familiarity with the text, as opposed to reserving the study of sacred text for an elite."

And for millennia, anti-Semitism prevented Jews from owning land and farm-



WORDS AND THE WORLD: Children work on laptops provided by Angola's sovereign wealth fund at a Dom Bosco Catholic mission school in Luanda, Angola. The first global study of religion and education levels revealed regional and gender differences.

ing and otherwise limited their choices for making a living, so they were forced into more entrepreneurial jobs, such as trading, which required literacy and numeracy, Cohen said.

Asked if the study might unintentionally fuel rising anti-Semitism, which today as in the past traffics in conspiracy theories that paint Jews as clever and conniving, Cohen said it shouldn't make a difference.

"Anti-Semites are already convinced," he said. "But I know many Jews are still worried about their place in society, and worry about appearing too successful, because that's been an anti-Semitic trope."

The wide gap between the world's best and least educated groups is also partly a function of where these groups tend to live in the world, the Pew researchers found. The vast majority of Jews live in either the United States or Israel, highly developed countries with high levels of education overall. By contrast, 98 percent of Hindu adults live in India, Nepal, and Bangladesh, where a solid education is available to only a minority. The study relied on the best and most recent data available from 151 countries, representing 95 percent of the world's population. The numbers indicate the quantity of education, but do not indicate its relative quality.

Among the study's findings:

- The youngest generations of Christian, Buddhist, and religiously unaffiliated women have achieved educational parity with men in average years of schooling. And the average Jewish woman has spent a year more in school than the average Jewish man.

- Christians, the world's largest religious group with 2.2 billion adherents, have remained fairly stable at the global level in their overall educational attainment over three generations. But their cumulative years of schooling vary widely by region.

- Religiously unaffiliated adults have 1.3 more years of schooling, on average, than religiously affiliated adults overall (8.8 versus 7.5 years). Researchers hypothesize that this is partly because the unaffiliated are disproportionately concentrated in countries with relatively high overall levels of educational attainment.

The data returned many surprises, Hackett said. Gaps between groups in education were often wider than researchers predicted, even within the same nation.

"We see this huge gap in sub-Saharan Africa between Christians and Muslims," Hackett said. Hackett hopes such findings spur government and other leaders to factor in religion as they try to raise education levels overall.

"Religion along with education are two of the things that have the biggest influence on our life outcomes, along with the kind of family we have and the kind of job we have," he said. —Lauren Markoe, Religion News Service

Religious Freedom Act also protects atheists

When President Obama signed a newly strengthened international religious freedom act, the intention was to protect religious believers around the world.

But the act, signed December 16, is being heralded by some legal scholars as a different milestone—for the first time, atheists and other nonreligious people are explicitly named as a class protected by the law.

Caroline Mala Corbin, professor of law at the University of Miami, noted that the new law "takes an expansive view of religious liberty, saying freedom of religion is not just about the right to practice religion. It is also about the right to have your own views about religion, including being agnostic and atheistic."

The law, called the Frank R. Wolf International Religious Freedom Act, has been in place since 1998. The original version established the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, a religious freedom watchdog group.

The new version of the law, named for a former Virginia congressman who championed its original version, specifically extends protection to atheists as well.

"The freedom of thought, conscience, and religion is understood to protect theistic and non-theistic beliefs," the act

states for the first time, "and the right not to profess or practice any religion."

It also condemns "specific targeting of non-theists, humanists, and atheists because of their beliefs" and enables the State Department to target "non-state actors" against religious freedom, like the self-described Islamic State, Boko Haram, and other groups.

The new law has been heralded by both Christians and atheists. Russell Moore, president of the Southern Baptist Convention's Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, called the legislation "a vital step toward protecting conscience freedom for millions of the world's most vulnerable, most oppressed people." And Roy Speckhardt, executive director of the American Humanist Association, called it "a significant step toward full acceptance and inclusion for non-religious individuals."

Getting the protections for atheists into the law was a four-year process, said Maggie Ardiente, communications director for AHA. In 2012, Ardiente and other atheist advocates met with members of the State Department to raise awareness of the persecution of nonbelievers. AHA legislative director Matthew Bulger took a seat—the first occupied by a representative from a non-theist organization—on the International Religious Freedom Roundtable, an informal group of religious leaders that consults with the State Department on religious liberty issues.

The AHA and other nontheist groups like American Atheists and Center for Inquiry have lobbied Congress on behalf of imprisoned and persecuted atheists in Saudi Arabia, Bangladesh, Pakistan, and elsewhere for several years.

Atheists in those countries have faced imprisonment, lashings, and execution, sometimes at the hands of violent mobs. In September, a Saudi man was sentenced to ten years in prison and 2,000 lashes for professing his atheism via social media.

The new version of the bill will strengthen the existing law in several ways:

- It directs the president to sanction individuals who carry out or order religious restrictions.

- It instructs the U.S. ambassador-at-

large for international religious freedom to report directly to the U.S. secretary of state.

• It requires all foreign service officers to be trained in the “strategic value of international religious freedom.”

Corbin said the new language in the IRFA could influence how U.S. courts regard atheists at home. All Americans are protected by the First Amendment, she said, but “there has always been controversy about the degree to which [atheists] should be protected. This law makes clear they are to be protected to the same extent” as religious believers.

Corbin also links the president’s signing of this act to another first.

“President Obama was the first president to explicitly acknowledge nonbelievers in his inaugural address, so this seems to fit into his legacy vis-à-vis nonbelievers,” she said. “What the next administration is going to do with this law and nonbelievers is a completely different question.” —Kimberly Winston, Religion News Service

Egyptian theologians look to early church history after recent attacks

Only a few days after the December 12 attack against the city’s Coptic Christians as they worshiped, theologians met near Cairo to seek unity in an early church father.

The academic conference Saint Irenaeus and Enlightened Humanity had been planned by the Anaphora Institute in collaboration with Lyon Catholic University in France.

“St. Irenaeus focused on the worldwide church as one body,” said Egyptian bishop Anba Thomas of El-Qussia, founder of the Anaphora Institute. “And our vision at Anaphora has been to emphasize that there are no foreigners here, as in Christ, we are all one in his image. We want life to be a practical implementation of that dimension of the teachings of St. Irenaeus, where we see the church as that beautiful image of a tree possessing deep, strong roots and open branches.”



PHOTO © ALBIN HILLERT / WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

PAST AND PRESENT: Egyptian Coptic Orthodox bishop Anba Thomas of El-Qussia draws from the theology of early church father St. Irenaeus, shown in the icon behind him, at a conference held days after a deadly attack on Coptic worshippers in Cairo.

Thierry Magnin and Marie-Hélène Robert from Lyon Catholic University stressed how Irenaeus came from the East and went to the West, creating a theology that integrates both.

“The theology of St. Irenaeus is in many ways a common ground between Eastern and Western traditions of Christianity,” Magnin said.

John Behr from St. Vladimir’s Orthodox Theological Seminary, introducing the first session of the conference, stressed the many similarities between the theological context of St. Irenaeus and the present day.

“We should remember that Irenaeus’ writings come from a pre-imperial Christian context, which in many ways is similar to the times we live in today,” Behr said. “Our understanding of theology has since been fragmented, and it is sometimes difficult to see what holds us together. But I believe that our objective here in Egypt, in studying the teachings of Irenaeus, is a way to come together to move forward.”

Bishop Thomas also saw the gathering as an opportunity to focus on Jesus’ teaching to love one’s enemies and resist the temptation to succumb to hatred after the bombing of the Coptic cathedral in Cairo, which killed 25 people and injured 31 others. Militants from the so-called Islamic State claimed responsibility.

“Our hearts are bleeding, our tears are not stopping, but still we forgive, we carry our cross, in dignity and in peace,” Thomas said. “In St. Irenaeus, we can learn of the dignity of those who have left us in martyrdom.”

Bishop Anba Angaelos, who leads the Coptic Orthodox Church in the U.K., released a statement after the attacks, noting that Christians have faced persecution in various places throughout the past two millennia. Like Thomas, he called for forgiveness, but not at the price of neglecting justice.

“Forgiveness ensures that our own hearts are not entangled in a web of anger and resentment, or corrupted by feelings of hatred or revenge,” he said. “Forgiveness is ultimately liberating and empowering, but at the same time, justice is essential; not for the purposes of punishment, but to secure and protect our societies in which people must respectfully live side by side.”

He also urged the Egyptian government to do more to hold perpetrators accountable: “In recent decades, we have seen recurring acts of violence against Christians and Christian communities in Egypt. Time and time again, very few, if any, perpetrators have been brought to justice, and we subsequently continue to witness an escalation of these attacks.”

Ten percent of Egypt’s population is Christian. In August, Egypt passed a law with rules for church construction that are more restrictive than those for a mosque, the Associated Press reported.

Churches must apply to the governor of their province in order to build, according to the law, and the governor must consider “the preservation of security and public order” before approving any new building, AP reported. There have been riots and attacks when Christians have constructed without permits or worshiped in other buildings.

Nader Shukry, a Christian activist and researcher, told AP the threat of mob violence from the Salafi Muslim sect could influence decisions. “What if Salafis protest against the construction of a church, would this prompt the governor to turn down the request, for fear of national security?” he asked. —Albin Hillert, for the World Council of Churches; the CHRISTIAN CENTURY staff

Jews and Muslims partner in efforts to defend religious minorities

When Sheryl Olitzky first broached the subject of a Jewish-Muslim women's group, Atiya Aftab didn't buy it.

"Why is someone calling me because I'm Muslim?" Aftab recalled thinking. "This is creepy."

But as Olitzky made her case over lattes at a Starbucks in suburban New Jersey, Aftab found herself drawn in.

"This is a woman extending her hand to me, saying, 'I want to get to know you, I want to be your protector, I want to have your back because I know what you're going through, because of what the Jewish community has been through,'" said Aftab, a professor at Rutgers's Center for Middle Eastern Studies. "That was so compelling."

After that meeting in 2010, the two women launched the Sisterhood of Salaam Shalom, a casual gathering of Muslim and Jewish women talking about faith and family, sharing their experiences as religious minorities in America. Today, the group has chapters in more than 50 cities.

"There's more of a sense of urgency," Aftab said. "We've heard from people all over the country, even all over the world, saying, 'I need to reach out and do something constructive rather than be affected by this fear in a negative way.'"

The success of groups such as the Sisterhood point to a growing—and perhaps unprecedented—desire among American Muslims and Jews to work toward a common goal, some say.

"More people have become aware of their common faiths given the rise of toxic anti-Muslim, anti-Semitic hate," said Haroon Moghul, senior fellow and director of development at the Center for Global Policy, a New York think tank. "There's been a definite change—and for the better."

Recently business, political, and religious leaders from both communities for the first time formed a joint advisory council that seeks to give Muslim and Jewish Americans a national voice.

Jewish-Muslim relations are "the single thorniest interfaith issue of our time," Moghul said. "If we can find a way to talk and to understand and respect each other even as we disagree, then we are establishing a model."

Amid a post-election spike in anti-Islamic sentiment, local Jewish groups have stepped up their support for Muslims in their own communities.

When mosques in Rhode Island, Ohio, Michigan, Georgia, Colorado, and California received copies of a threatening letter in November calling Muslims "a vile and filthy people" and saying that president-elect Donald Trump is "going to do to you Muslims what Hitler did to the Jews [*sic*]," Jewish groups were among the first to reach out, said Ojala Ahmad, communications director for the Council on American-Islamic Relations in Los Angeles.

One Jewish group out of New Haven, Connecticut, started an online campaign to raise funds for a Muslim nonprofit, urging fellow Jews to "hold ourselves accountable for the intersectional oppressions Muslim people are facing, and honor and join the movements Muslim Americans are building to combat white supremacy and advocate for their rights."

In Los Angeles, another Jewish-Muslim partnership formed after a meeting at a community center. Michelle Missaghieh, a rabbi, and Aziza Hasan, a mediator with years of experience in coalition building, started organizing local meetings for women to study the Qur'an and Torah. The program became a key part of NewGround, an organization that fosters interfaith relationships through programs, grants, internships, and a leadership council for high school students.

For both NewGround and the Sisterhood of Salaam Shalom, the goal was to bridge a gap between two faith groups that share a rich history and experience as religious minorities in Christian-majority America.

Crossing the boundaries of faith to form relationships around those shared realities not only allows Muslim and Jewish Americans to hear and understand each other's stories. It also helps them create a community that can together compose a more powerful narrative about their place in American society, said Brie

Loskota, executive director of the Center for Religion and Civic Culture at the University of Southern California.

"Groups that are willing to talk and learn and still maintain their identities and distinctiveness represent a real promise for what a pluralistic society looks like," she said. "If every disagreement is an existential disagreement, then the work of knitting together a society of 300 million people becomes almost impossible."

For decades, Jews and Muslims in the United States have clashed on the issue of Israel-Palestine, and it's no different with the new Muslim-Jewish Advisory Council, which debuted just days after the election. Its members often stand on opposite ends of the conflict, yet all of them are dedicated to promoting both communities' concerns in the United States, said Robert Silverman, U.S. director of Muslim-Jewish relations for the American Jewish Committee.

The council's work can bolster grassroots efforts like the Sisterhood and NewGround, he said.

"This new council adds a leadership, national-level body that can talk about things happening throughout the country and get some change done," he said. "You have to have community-based organizations; otherwise it's just a bunch of talking heads. But if it's only grassroots groups, it stays limited. You need both to work." —Jessica Mendoza, *The Christian Science Monitor*

Sacred and secular unite on Basque church's walls

The Iglesia de San Miguel is the pride of Antezana de Foronda, a tiny town in Spain's Basque Country. Yet the 16th-century church, with its spectacular wooden carvings and baroque altarpiece, had fallen on hard times.

Residents had saved the church once, decades ago, when they mobilized to fight an airport extension steps away from the sanctuary. In recent years, forces of nature and the passage of time were taking their toll on the town shrine.

"We saw our cultural identity slipping



ART AND MUSIC: With recently painted murals on its walls, the Iglesia de San Miguel in Spain's Basque region is an inviting backdrop for concerts like one featuring singer Helene Garcia Barrenetxea (right).

away," said Diego Bermejo, a philosophy and ethics professor at the University of Deusto in Bilbao, who lives in the town of 100 people, which has no public buildings other than the church. "A town that lets its past die kills its future."

Bermejo, mayor José Luis Alonso, and others wanted to revive and strengthen the cultural history of the town, preserving a space where church rituals would be observed, while welcoming people for concerts, dance performances, and theater.

Once again the town pooled its resources, stabilized the church walls, sealed the cracks, and repaired the roof. But the townspeople were hardly finished.

A 68-year-old former Franciscan monk and fine artist stepped into the church for the first time in 2011, and the bare walls and gilded baroque altarpiece spoke to him.

"I knew I was on a journey but had no idea where it would lead," said Xabier Egana.

Egana had painted murals in the Basílica of Arantzazu, an example of Spanish religious art and architecture from the second half of the 20th century.

The mural project linked Egana with artists in the Basque Vanguard, a movement that arose out of the Spanish Civil War and the rejection of dictator Francisco Franco.

Now largely retired, Egana offered to create paintings on the walls of the San Miguel church for free.

"The town wanted their church back, and I could help realize that dream and

earn their gratitude," he said. "That's payment enough."

Egana filled the church's gateway with images familiar to the town's residents: the nearby airport control tower, upside-down flying airplanes, and a protest march leading to the airport. Neighbors were also pictured singing and dancing under a deep blue sky in a *romería*, a popular outdoor religious festival.

The town was captivated. "We showed what was possible," Bermejo said. Support from the diocese followed shortly after that.

Egana began to map out the cavernous space for what would become *Pinturas Para La Vida* or "Paintings for Life."

His idea was to join 50-foot-high by 25-foot-wide walls into a single narrative, stitching together biblical stories with historic events and literary allusions. The choir walls are a massive triptych that covers the final moments in the life of Jesus with the Last Supper, Judas's betrayal, Jesus praying in Gethsemane, and his death and resurrection under a tormented reddish sky. Larger-than-life looming black shapes represent Roman soldiers who have come to take Jesus prisoner. Drawings on the sidewalls chronicle Adam and Eve and the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse.

Other parts of the mural are drawn from contemporary times: five labor organizers killed in church during Franco's dictatorship, an Ottoman era bridge destroyed (and now rebuilt) in

Bosnia and Herzegovina, a nuclear power plant, tombstones from the Old Jewish Cemetery in Prague.

"His work expresses what it means to be human confronting the meaning of existence, in the drama of life and death, hopes and dreams," Bermejo said.

Edorta Kortadi, director of the Religious Art Museum at the Santa Maria del Coro Basilica in San Sebastian, said the Iglesia de San Miguel murals remain faithful to biblical storytelling while calling attention to human rights and social justice.

"As life became more secular, so did church art," Kortadi said. "During the 20th century the subject matter becomes thematically less religious in the hands of great masters like Picasso, Chagall, Matisse, or Americans like Rothko, Pollock. Egana is clearly influenced by them."

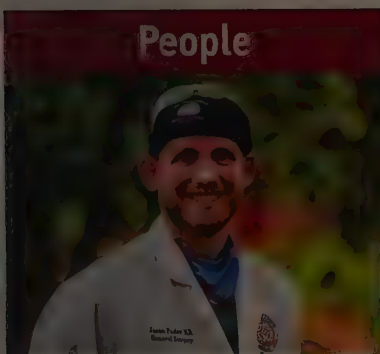
Egana has become a town treasure, with a crew of devoted fans who follow his daily work, helping to lug paint jugs up and down scaffolding and doing other chores that allow the work to go smoothly.

"The murals not only celebrate our cultural identity, but transcend it," said Alonso, the town mayor.

Egana, now 73, expects to complete the work by next summer.

"My intent was not to preach, but to inspire reflection," he said. "I hope this becomes a spiritual space where anyone of any religion or any faith can contemplate the mysteries of life." —Rosanne Skirble, Religion News Service

People



■ **Jason Fader**, one of a dozen surgeons serving the nation of Burundi, won the first-ever Gerson L'Chaim Prize for Outstanding Christian Medical Missionary Service.

The \$500,000 prize is given by the African Mission Healthcare Foundation, which supports medical missionaries and mission hospitals. The president is Jon Fielder, a medical missionary in Kenya, who founded the organization with his friend Mark Gerson, an entrepreneur and author.

"Dr. Fader and his team are a link in a string of unsung heroes," Gerson said in a statement.

Fader and his wife, Heather, who are both 1999 graduates of Calvin College, serve with Serge, a nondenominational Reformed agency previously called World Harvest Mission. Fader's parents were also medical missionaries, serving in Kenya.

During medical training in Ann Arbor, Michigan, they met two other families at Knox Presbyterian Church and formed a medical missions team, according to their blog, mccropders.com.

The team moved to Burundi in 2013, making a multidecade commitment there. They serve as the clinical faculty for Hope Africa University's medical school, and Fader is assistant medical director for Kibuye Hope Hospital, a 100-bed hospital.

"Hundreds of people will walk because of this prize, thousands will receive care, and tens of thousands will be helped by the doctors we will train here in Burundi," Fader said in a video.

Fader plans to use the prize money to complete a new ward at the hospital, to buy orthopedic equipment for surgeries

on fractures, and to expand laboratories at the medical school.

"Our 30-year strategic plan envisions this place becoming a national center of medical care and education," the team wrote on its blog. "Maybe this will come to pass through us. Maybe in spite of us. Certainly it's a task for which we are insufficient in our own strength and capacities." —the CHRISTIAN CENTURY staff

■ **Gertrude "Trudy" Bush**, a contributing editor of the CHRISTIAN CENTURY, died December 13 at age 77 in Upper Arlington, Ohio.

Bush spent 13 years on staff at the CHRISTIAN CENTURY and continued to write for the magazine after her retirement in 2004.

She was a refugee from Yugoslavia at the end of World War II, and her family lived in several refugee camps before coming to the United States.

She earned a doctorate in English literature and taught English in Algeria along with her husband as United Methodist missionaries. The time spent living in North Africa led to a passion for Muslim-Christian dialogue that continued throughout her life. She was also an activist for justice for Palestinians.

In a 2007 article on Muslim women in the United States, Bush wrote: "The stereotyping of Muslim women has a long history in the West. In the past the image of the subjugated, ignorant Muslim woman was used as a pretext for colonial domination and for Christian missionary endeavors."

Women's liberation was also cited as a reason for U.S. military action in Afghanistan and Iraq, with the hijab depicted as oppressive, she noted.

"For many young professional women, Islamic dress is also meant to signal an identity that faithfully adheres to Islam but has nothing to do with being subjugated," she wrote. "Women are choosing to wear the headscarf even though they know it may make them the targets of hate crimes and the victims of discrimination in the workplace, just as Christian women in different

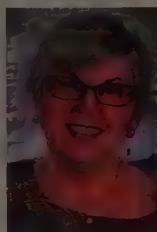


PHOTO COURTESY OF ELLIOTT BUSH

times and places chose to wear crosses or fish symbols even if doing so subjected them to persecution." —the CHRISTIAN CENTURY staff

■ **Boise Kimber**, pastor of First Calvary Baptist Church in New Haven, Connecticut, saw his congregation pay more than \$1,000 for a website, only to have the people they purchased it from disappear.

Now Kimber's church is the model for a company, Grace Church Websites, launched in partnership with Kimber's friend **Don Vaccaro**, a business executive who is also a Baptist.

"A lot of people could not afford to buy the domain and some of the churches are rural churches," Kimber said. "We are certainly dealing with the digital divide and trying to open the doors for more advancement for people who are in need."

Through Grace Church Websites, more than 670 churches and nonprofits, many of them predominantly black or Hispanic, have new sites. They include African Methodist Episcopal, United Methodist, and nondenominational congregations.

In a 2015 Faith Communities Today survey, about 80 percent of the 4,400 congregations contacted have websites, a 10 percent increase from 2010. Thirty-one percent offer online giving, which raises annual per capita giving in those congregations by \$114 per person.

Scott Thumma of the Hartford Institute for Religion Research said there is "still neither overly robust nor effective use by a majority of congregations" of the Internet and social media.

Vaccaro hopes that websites might help churches network with local businesses.

"I wanted to bring churches back a little bit in prominence because they really do deserve that in our society," he said. —Adelle M. Banks, Religion News Service



PHOTOS COURTESY OF GRACE CHURCH WEBSITES



LIVING The Word

February 5, Fifth Sunday after Epiphany

Isaiah 58:1–12; 1 Corinthians 2:1–12; Matthew 5:13–20

YOU ARE the salt of the earth. . . . You are the light of the world."

For a lifelong, saved-by-grace Lutheran, these simple declaratives are sweet indeed. There's no works righteousness sneaking in here. God has done all the heavy lifting; it's a done deal. It's "you *are*," not "you should be" or "you may become" or even "you must." You are, period. That's grace.

The trouble, of course, is that the fullness of grace is in the details.

It's easy to find a Christian who can recite the phrase "we are justified by grace"; it's more difficult to find one who lives out a deep understanding of that phrase. For too many of us too much of the time, being a Christian is about morality, about sustaining a boundary that sets us apart—or, too often, above.

Isaiah makes short work of this notion. He cries out against the confusion of true and false worship, condemning God's people for honoring the letter of the law while ignoring its spirit. For this sham adherence to the code, they expect God to respond to their cries—and are disappointed when God seems not to notice. Through the prophet, God calls them to abandon their hollow obedience, that they might come to know God by fulfilling the intent of the law through just and compassionate care for the neighbor.

To be sure, that's low-hanging fruit. That simple declaration is the foundation of nearly all prophetic proclamation. It's not very original.

Still, the human propensity for rationalizing sinful, inward-turning behavior means it can't be repeated too frequently. We are not only slow learners; we are, to borrow a phrase, a stiff-necked people, stubbornly resistant to change.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus embraces and renews this prophetic message. Having just proclaimed the Beatitudes, the upside-down values of God's reign, he explains how these values are incarnated in the lives of believers. Just as God blesses the poor in spirit because God chooses to do so (and not because people have rushed to spiritual poverty to earn that blessing), so God simply chooses to create and commission salt and light for the earth. By grace, God chooses us.

That said, it's clear that it's a lot more complicated for us to actually *be* salt and light than it was for us to *become* salt and light. Being salt and light involves giving ourselves away completely. True salt, salt that has not lost its taste, disappears into food to make the food tastier. Jesus' disciples transform the world by disappearing in humble service. Life in a world thus salted is savory.

Likewise, light that is not bound by obstructions dissipates

over miles, like the ripples of self-giving service. Life in a world so enlightened is liberated from bondage to darkness.

The rub, of course, is that we humans, even we so-called faithful ones, are hesitant to give ourselves away quite so fully, to dissolve or dissipate quite so completely. We like to hold back a little or to cluster with like-minded people so that we can compliment one another on our saltiness and brightness without the effort of salting or lighting anything.

Here in the United States at least, we who call ourselves Christian have for some time tended to cluster our salt and concentrate our light to the exclusion of others and to the benefit of none. Trading humility for hubris, we have salted our culture well nigh to death with notions utterly foreign to the Sermon on the Mount. We speak of Christian values, Christian policies, Christian economics, Christian candidates, Christian plumbers, Christian Internet plans, and even Christian hookup sites. We lament being persecuted Christians, overlooked Christians, insulted and mocked Christians, even Christians deprived of the phrase "Merry Christmas," too good for this world.

Called simply to bear the savor of our Savior, we bear instead the bitterness of our better-ness. Too much salt is thrown out and trampled underfoot—along with the food it has tainted.

Is it any wonder that the ranks of the nones are filled out by the dones—those who have experienced the church and want nothing more to do with it? Better, it seems, to chew on a life less savory than to risk the nauseating experience of swallowing nothing but salt.

In the same way, we too often hide our light—or at least contain its glow—under a bushel basket, fearful that letting it shine farther might make it less bright in our immediate vicinity. It is as though there are corners of God's world unworthy of the illumination they would know if we let our light be placed on a lampstand rather than under the security of a basket. We should not be surprised that many would rather stand with others in the darkness than be cursed by light that shines only on some.

Ultimately, to *be* salt and light, to be used by God as God intends, is to dissolve and to dissipate, and in the process to flavor and enlighten. There is no partial dissolution, no limited dissipation. To be salt and light is to live the old hymn that says, "I surrender all."

There remains only this hitch: the realization that this dissolving and dissipating is best known by another name—dying. Dying to control, dying to security, dying to self. That in turn is the shortest route—the only route—to resurrection.

And so Paul proclaims to the Corinthians and to us that he will know nothing "except Jesus Christ, and him crucified." Not wisdom, not lofty words, neither heaped-up salt nor basket-bound light—but Christ crucified, drawing behind those who would bear the cross, letting their light shine, dying to live.

Reflections on the lectionary

February 12, Sixth Sunday after Epiphany

Matthew 5:21-49

THE NOTION OF an “if/then” relationship between law and gospel persists in the minds of many a preacher. Today’s texts make a delightful train wreck of that proposal: the Deuteronomy passage contains only two “ifs,” whereas the Matthew passage manages to include six. It’s a Sunday to consider seeking the gospel in the heart of the written law as part of an effort to avoid the law in the heart of the written gospel.

Some of us, however, love living in the tension of viewing the whole of the word as a matter of “both/and”: it’s all good news, whether it’s labeled law or gospel. Or, more precisely: over the course of the history of God’s people, the particularities of human “if/then” decision points are swallowed up in the “because/therefore” arc of God’s will, which leans toward the salvation of us children whom—let’s be honest—only God could love.

In the Deuteronomy text, the human specifics are pretty clear. On behalf of God, Moses lays out the choices: “life and prosperity” versus “death and adversity.” These are pretty straightforward outcomes. The means to achieving them are equally straightforward. “If you obey” God’s commandments and ways, then you shall live. “If your heart turns away,” then you shall perish. It is as cut and dried as a teacher setting out the rules of the classroom on the first day of school.

Yet it is also clear that these are not the rules of a classroom teacher, not the threats of a cosmic cop or the warnings of a dispassionate judge. These are the admonitions of a loving parent—the “if you poke the cat, then you’ll get scratched” kind of warning that has nothing to do with justice or judgment and everything to do with compassion and care. The whole point of this passage is revealed in its final verse: God is laying out if/then warnings in the hope of achieving a because/therefore end. All of these commands are laid out “so that you may live in the land that the LORD swore to give to your ancestors.” In other words, “because I have promised you this land, therefore I am giving you these rules for living in it.”

The Israelites haven’t just wandered to the doorstep of potential plunder. They have arrived at the destination God has prepared for them, and the divine will is that they should receive it and prosper in it. Walking in God’s ways will ensure that.

The Gospel text is another matter. Last week’s text was salted with grace; this week’s is peppered with threat. The particularities of human choice lead to a variety of unpleasant outcomes—if one acts wrongly, then one is liable to judgment, to the council, to the hell of fire; will be imprisoned until the last penny is paid; will have one’s whole body thrown into hell. One gets the impression Jesus is trying to get our attention.

Read the entire passage, however, and the threats of human

particularity can be seen in the promise of a larger divine whole. Since way back in verse 11, when the Beatitudes shifted from a universal “blessed are they” to a focused “blessed are you,” Jesus has been addressing a community—the community of those who would follow. Next week the focus shifts beyond the community, beyond the neighbor all the way to the enemy. For now, though, Jesus is speaking to life in the community, to one’s conduct toward brothers and sisters.

It is as though these sentences are all clarifications of a larger declaration of Jesus—something along the lines of “because I have called you into life-giving community, therefore I give you these rules for sustaining that community’s life.” In other words, while specific disobedience threatens (very!) negative consequences, the outcome of a holistic obedience is a community knit together by intentional, compassionate behavior toward one another.

In this community, it is not enough only to avoid homicide. There is no room even for anger, insult, or name-calling—no room for behaviors that chip away at relationship and community. In this body, one approaches the altar only when one’s broken relationships are reconciled. In this circle, one not only resists the outright adultery that fractures others’ unions; one refuses even to objectify another with a lustful glance. Community happens between people, not mere objects.

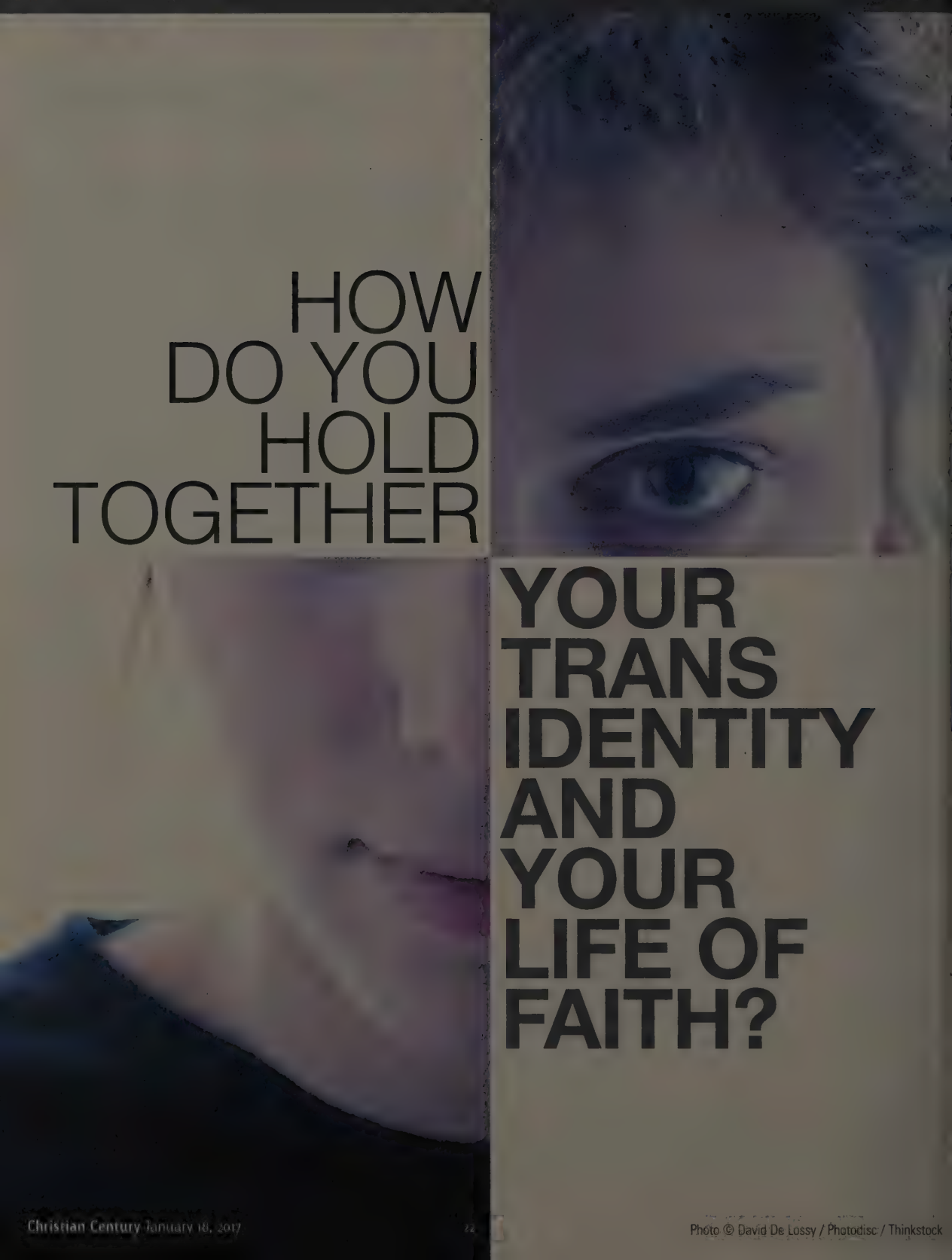
Here, cutting off a member of one’s own body is preferable to the sin that may cut off a member of the community. Divorcing a spouse—or being willing to marry one who has been divorced—acknowledges an openness to fractured relationships that is at odds with this community’s ethic. Even making a vow introduces an unhelpful interference to connectedness—let your yes be yes and your no be no, solely for the sake of the connection you have, and not because you’re considering a vow external to that relationship.

The true challenge of this demanding ethic is not in avoiding the fearsome consequences it threatens or in executing the drastic actions it requires. It is in living a life so fully committed to the community, its members, and the One who calls it into being.

It is precisely because the Corinthians have fallen so far short of this ethic that Paul expresses such frustration with them. For all he has shown them of the good news of their salvation, they cannot get past the temptation to express allegiance not to Christ nor even to their own congregation, but to factions within it. Created and crafted for divine purposes, they are “behaving according to human inclinations”—an experience too familiar to us all.

Those human inclinations will continue until the eschaton. Nonetheless, in faith we glimpse just enough of God’s promise to strive for more Christlike behavior, more united human community, more abundant life. Let’s choose life.

The author is Brian Maas, bishop of the Nebraska Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.



HOW
DO YOU
HOLD
TOGETHER

**YOUR
TRANS
IDENTITY
AND
YOUR
LIFE OF
FAITH?**

My granny once told my grandpa to darn his own socks! This was a gender radical thing to do. She also rode motorcycles, and to many a baby she sang German lullabies while they drifted off to sleep. She had two books in her house, not counting cookbooks (of which there weren't any). I found and read both of them as a curious child. A *Piano Favorites* primer, and a dusty dollar paperback by Roger Shinn called *The Sermon on the Mount: A Layman's Guide* (a bestseller in 1954).

I have no idea what Roger Shinn would have said about "transgender Americans." (That wasn't a phrase we had then.) But after my granny died, I grew up to be one. And an ordained minister, now working in the national office that regularly teaches Shinn's later work: the United Church of Christ *Statement of Faith*. In both works, Shinn cites the countercultural cost of discipleship. The context is international, not

Part of me is welcome in the church and part is not.

merely personal. Yet this idea—and some angels along with it—saved me from suicide and preserved my faith when I had to commit to life transition as a young adult, despite the judgment of everybody I knew.

I shouldn't say it was a solitary road. It turned out to be the opposite—I was accompanied by numerous trans people, risk-takers, and world-changers. That company exists today partly in the church community and partly not. I'm all too aware that part of me is welcome in the church and part not. Yet I'm living out my vow as an ordained minister on behalf of Jesus—who went outside (up on a mountain) to proclaim who the blessed people are.

Because Jesus went that far, I believe, all the people inside all the churches are included too. Then and now and in ages to come. Even while we work on our "isms." Racism, normalism, poor-people-don't-matter-ism, sexism, and militarism. Oh—and bathrooms. Of which my granny had one.

— **Malcolm Himschoot**, *United Church of Christ pastor and writer, who was featured in the 2005 documentary Call Me Malcolm*

Early in life I was taught that God knows and loves everything and everyone, including me. My childhood congregation said next to nothing about sexuality. We were busy. We were engaged in the struggle for civil rights. There was no time to beat up on people for their sexuality. As a result, I didn't grow up with religious self-hatred: I felt that God was fine with my trans identity. But I quickly learned that most people were not. I held my identity as a secret between myself and God, for my own safety.

As I embarked on my call to ordained ministry I felt God would help me keep our secret for the rest of my life. That was not to be. When I came out as trans to my supervising pastor, I lost a position, an income, a vocation, my peers, friends, a church home, my reason for living, and almost my faith. I fell into a darkness that felt like something out of the Psalms: the depths, the pit, bowls of tears, the wilderness. It felt like death.

But God never let go. I came again into the light of day, ready to start my new life, even as I knew that I would never be separated from my old life. I would have to find a way to make sense of the two. I didn't have to go far to find that way. I found it in Jesus.

At the heart of the gospel is Christ's death and resurrection. In baptism a person becomes a part of Jesus' death and resurrection. I began to look at my transition as a baptismal story. I began to use the language of death and resurrection to talk about my life. Being trans and passing through transition helped me understand that death and resurrection is the way Christians move through the world. It is the pattern of our lives.

I began to see myself as an icon of resurrection. That led me to see all trans people as icons of resurrection. An icon should be treated gently, with respect and dignity. I'm learning daily that all of us are icons of death and resurrection in some way.

My trans identity has deepened and broadened my faith.

My trans identity has deepened and broadened my faith. However, my experience is far from universal. For many of my trans sisters and brothers the church is a painful place. It saddens me when I see my Christian sisters and brothers demonizing trans folk. Still, even when I look upon death I hope for resurrection.

— **Carla Robinson**, *Episcopal priest, who was featured in the 2012 documentary Voices of Witness: Out of the Box*

Assigned female at birth, I did not find in my faith tradition good models for how to be female. Bodies are sacred, but consciously and unconsciously we teach that female bodies are dangerous and need to be hidden, and that women do not know themselves well enough to decide how to care for themselves. While that is our culture, that is not my faith. But disentangling faith from culture is hard.

In my first year as a pastor I realized I had been wanting an external authority to tell me to transition. The required psychological evaluation before seminary had shown what I always knew, that I am an "average hyperactive male." I wanted a doctor to tell me to do something about it so I wouldn't

have to take responsibility for the inevitable conflict that might follow.

But we live out our faith in conflict, wrestling at the Jabbok. Most established faith communities, in my experience, are afraid of conflict. I was always welcome in church, but I was also always aware of being different, socially and personally. When I came out as bisexual in seminary, my gut reaction was that I would have to leave the church. Instead I found that God's love is bigger than the church, the Creator is not finished with me, and the Spirit continues loving me into wholeness.

My faith gives me the freedom to refuse assimilation.

Yet I walk with a limp, aware of the ways my cultural tradition is broken and keeps people broken and afraid. My roots in Augustinian anthropology mean that any thought of doing something for myself gets wrapped up in selfishness and shame. Luther wrestled with this constantly. But not to present myself honestly to the world is to deny the work of my Creator. I am not simply male, I am transmasculine, and that is important and holy. My faith gives me the freedom and strength to refuse assimilation.

Nobody know what our final wholeness will look like, feel like, or sound like. We are not even the same today as ten years ago. But the first creation myth in Genesis says we were created in the divine image. If God is limited to one way of being male and female, with no variation between or outside of that binary, then we lose the colors of the full spectrum and are left with black and white, no shades of gray. Our God transgresses boundaries. Jesus disregards purity segregations to infect us with *shalom*.

— **Andrew Tobias Nelson**, pastor at Christ Our Emmanuel Lutheran Church in Chatham, New York

I remember vividly how the church enabled my transition. On one of San Francisco's sunny and windy days in June 1997, I marched in my first Gay Pride parade. I hadn't yet come out publicly, and I was terrified. The parade danced, pranced, and strode from the Civic Center, down Market Street to the Ferry Building on the shore of San Francisco Bay. I trotted past deep crowds on both sides of the street, mixing drag, leather, kink, every conceivable permutation of sex and gender. But I was lost. Sure, I had friends in TransGender San Francisco—but that was parties, not real life. I wondered whether I was about to step off a cliff, transitioning not into living as my true self, but rather into dying as a despised and humiliated fool who had compulsively thrown away a perfectly good life, career, and family.

The parade terminated where various organizations had set up booths to recruit members or sell products. There I found a

table saying, "The Episcopal Church welcomes you!" I was aghast. Don't all Christians hate us? Don't they hate transsexuals especially? A welcome seemed too much to hope for. I am a cradle Episcopalian. My parents had homeschooled me when we lived in the Philippines, where they were missionaries when I was a young child. Could I find a home here, in the church?

The table was staffed by the late Bishop Otis Charles together with other gay men and lesbians from the Church of St. John the Evangelist in the Mission District near the Castro. I asked Bishop Charles, "Are transgender people welcome too?" He replied, "Yes." I pressed, "Do you have any transgender members of your church?" He answered, speaking for the others, "No, we've never met one before." Every Sunday for a year I drove from the Peninsula, where I lived, up to the city to attend church. I cried throughout every service for the first two months, from relief and gratitude that I had found a place of acceptance.

I remember vividly how the church enabled my transition.

And then there was communion. There I stood before God. Was I really "Joan"? Or was I what my previous name would have implied—a cross-dressing, delusional impostor? This was the moment of truth. If I could take communion as Joan, then I really am Joan.

My first communion as Joan became the precise moment of my real transition. My public transition with a legal name and gender change followed a year later.

— **Joan Roughgarden**, evolutionary biologist and ecologist, and author of *Evolution's Rainbow* (University of California Press)

When I first began taking testosterone nearly 20 years ago, the changes in my body were more rapid than I had anticipated. In fact, about six weeks into the process, I walked out of my office door and was startled to see a strange man standing across from me. A couple of seconds later I realized that the stranger was my own reflection in the mirrored windows. At a time when my outward appearance was transforming and people's perceptions of me were in flux, I had a sure sense that God knew exactly who I was and loved me as I am. This certainty gave me a solid sense of identity in the midst of change.

Raised in a devout, progressive Christian home that emphasized God's love rather than God's judgment, I never felt condemned by God. My transition from female to male was a response to God's calling to me to make this journey, and it has blessed me. My experiences of seeing the world, and being perceived, as both female and male have broadened my ability to relate to others.

Three scripture passages sustain me and guide my ministry. The first is Isaiah 56, in which God overturns the prohibitions in Leviticus about those who fall outside of the gender binary. Instead God promises us an everlasting monument and a name better than sons and daughters. This passage speaks of the profound love that God has for all people, with a particular passion for those on the margins.

God has a particular passion for those on the margins.

Second, Jesus' response to the question "Who is my neighbor?" with the parable of the Good Samaritan is profoundly applicable. Transgender people, particularly young women of color, face staggeringly high rates of violence. Add to this the rampant discrimination we face in housing, employment, education, and medical care (see the National Transgender Discrimination Survey for details), and it is clear that transgender people are often left bleeding—literally and figuratively—at the side of the road. Religious people often pass us by. Some actively work to block nondiscrimination and hate crime bills or to enact laws preventing our use of public spaces. Jesus' story, however, calls us to be healers rather than judges.

Finally, I am inspired by the beautiful story in Acts 8 where the apostle Philip encounters an Ethiopian eunuch on the road and explains the story of Jesus. As they pass a pool of water, the eunuch asks what is to prevent him from being baptized. Philip doesn't even need to answer in words; he simply baptizes the eunuch. Baptism names us into the community of Christ. This passage reminds me to be about the same work of creating a spiritual home without barriers for transgender people and all others.

— **Justin Tanis**, *United Church of Christ pastor and director of the Center for LGBTQ and Gender Studies in Religion at Pacific School of Religion*

A few years ago my Episcopal priest in Chicago gave a sermon on the journey of spirit as a unifying of the soul and the external persona. I realized with a jolt that my journey across genders was just that. "Aha," I said to myself, "it's the same as my gender crossing from 1995 to

My gender crossing has been a unifying of soul and body.

1997." (By the way, I prefer the term *gender crosser* to transsexual, which is clinical, scary and focused on sex, sex, sex. The Latinate term makes my journey sound like some indulged pleasuring, when in fact it was a spiritual/physical

evolution.) For reasons that suddenly made sense during that sermon, this lifelong agnostic had become an enthusiastic member of the Episcopal Church. And so she has remained, a member in good standing of Grace Church's women's group and every year a little further on the Christian journey.

— **Deirdre Nansen McCloskey**, *economist and author of Crossing: A Memoir (University of Chicago Press)*

I transitioned to male because it was survival: in order to have any semblance of quality of life I needed to be myself. I transitioned knowing that it might cost me my family, my chance at ordination, and more. What I didn't expect is that it would strengthen my faith in incredible ways.

I grew up in a faith tradition that was both emotional and anti-intellectual. We were warned to be careful what books we read, what preachers we listened to, and what we watched. We were warned that our faith was to be protected at all costs. As I left that tradition and explored my own intellect, I felt the emotion of my childhood faith slipping away. I could understand the historical context of scripture, grapple with church history, and defend my sexuality and gender against all naysayers. But I missed the personal relationship I used to have with God. I couldn't see any way back to that place.

My physical transformation was a move toward wholeness.

Then I transitioned. My physical transformation was a move toward wholeness that allowed me to access parts of myself I had never experienced before. I was able to understand myself as a person with a body, and that understanding shaped how I read scripture. I saw how bodily the Christian faith was—from Ezekiel's valley of dry bones to Jesus' resurrection (with a body still bearing scars) to the numerous stories of meals shared, bodies healed, and of course the emphasis on resurrection.

This emphasis on the body allowed me to see myself in scripture. I saw my complicated and complex body as a part of the biblical narrative. That entry point gave me a way to combine my intellectual pursuit with my own emotional story. It gave me a faith that was all-encompassing. For the first time I was allowed to be both smart and emotionally connected. I was allowed to understand the historical and the personal.

My transition has allowed me to find wholeness not only in my physical form but also in my faith. When Jesus said that he came to give us abundant life, I believe he was talking about a wholeness of body and soul, of mind and emotion, of past and present. A wholeness that allows us to approach life and faith

as intertwined in beautiful ways. This was a gift that I never expected.

— **Shannon T. L. Kearns**, *theologian and priest in the Apostolic Catholic Church of America*

When I was born, my doctor took a look between my legs and found what he determined to be the indicator of my gender identity. My doctor would have been right 98 percent of the time. I am one of the 2 percent of people who are certain that the doctor made a mistake, not God.

“For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and

wonderfully made” (Ps. 139:13–14, NIV). God made me in God’s image. I am the person God created me to be. I had to endure years of fighting my true identity in order to be broken and accept God’s will. I found peace when I gave up the fight to be the person everyone else wanted me to be and instead became the person God wants me to be.

Scripture adheres to a strict concept of male and

I identify with the Ethiopian eunuch from Acts 8.

female—the binary gender system. There are no examples in the Bible of people who easily translate into the modern conception of transgender identity. Eunuchs are mentioned as violating the gender binary, but the idea of eunuchs exemplifying transgender identity is inaccurate on many levels. They identified as male because there were no other options available to them. Many of them were castrated so they could serve a particular purpose in the ancient world, but some simply lived a life of celibacy or were unable to impregnate a female. This reality put into question their status as a “complete male,” but they still retained their identity as male. It’s safe to say that eunuchs did not identify as transgender because the concept was beyond their imagination.

Yet I identify with the Ethiopian eunuch from Acts 8—a person of color, a person not of the dominant culture, and a person who does not fit into the binary gender system. I see the world through the eyes of this eunuch. I, too, believe that Jesus Christ suffered, died, and rose from the dead so I may have eternal life in his kingdom. I have been baptized and am a recipient of God’s promises. I am a transgender Latina, and I have been recreated, justified, and sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

— **Nicole M. Garcia**, *candidate for ordained ministry in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America*

How to scan a poet

My doctor tells me I will need a scan;
I tap a nervous rhythm with my feet,
“Just count to five,” she says, “and then sit down.

The gist of it is printed on this sheet,
So read it over when you are at home.
We’ll have a clearer picture when we meet.”

I read the letter in a waiting room,
Its language strangely rich for one like me
Image, Contrast, Resonance; a poem

Slips into view amidst the litany
Of Latin terms that make our medicine
A new poetic terminology.

The door is opened. I am ushered in
To lisp my list of symptoms, to rehearse
The undiscovered art of naming pain.

“It’s called *deep inspiration*,” says the nurse,
“Draw deep for me then simply hold your breath
And stay composed.” So I compose this verse.

She says, “We dye for contrast, to unearth
Each hidden image, which might bring
Some clue that takes us closer to the truth.

Be still and I will pass you through the ring,
Three passes, all in rhythm, and you’re free,
The resonance will show us everything.”

And now my Muse says much the same to me,
Scanning these lines, and calling me to sing.

Malcolm Guite

A convert who chose Christianity at the age of 18, I framed my identity in terms learned from the Bible and Christian community. After seminary my doctoral work focused on how Christians biblically and theologically have understood being a woman. The earliest Christians expressed a radically grace-inspired equality. God seemed to scoff at humans’ self-important assumptions—most powerfully in God’s answer to Job, when God declares he has a womb (Job 38:29). Jesus too was unconfined by human gender assumptions, comparing himself to a mother hen.

But Paul’s repeated exhortations to faithful Christians that we must be mindful of “the weaker brethren” convicted me. I

preached the gospel of freedom and equality, but as a person unable to conform (even medically) to the female label assigned to me at birth, I shut myself down. I underwent reparative therapies (hormones, psychiatric medication, and counseling) for three decades. I tried to pass as the woman I was told I should be in order not to upset my “weaker brethren” in Christ, even when I was physically dying from the side effects. I was willing to do so for the sake of Christian unity. Eventually I made out my will, took a leave of absence from work, hosted a final visit with my parents, and stopped psychiatric medications. I wanted to face my last days sober, at peace with others.

Then a friend suggested that I try praying in a new way,

I learned to thank God for my being whatever I am.

giving God thanks for being exactly as I am, whatever that might be. For decades I had begged God to take away my “thorn in the flesh,” the failure to conform to my birth gender. Now I stopped wrestling with God. I surrendered, and

the words of Psalm 139 flooded my mind: “I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made.” Powerless in the face of God’s creativity, I thanked God for my being whatever I am—even if I myself don’t understand it.

Since coming out I’ve had to practice loving people who treat me as enemy. I’ve been blindsided by the violent hatred and indifference that other Christians have directed toward me, my children, and my friends. At the same time, a new community of the faithful came alongside me and upheld me. Trans people, intersex people, and gay and lesbian people have been family to me and my children. They have visited us when we were sick, brought us food, shared words of spiritual encouragement, and even prayed for those persecuting us in our moments of bitterness, fatigue, and despair. Like the woman who anointed Jesus’ feet with her tears and precious oil, those who have been cast out truly love much and help me to do the same.

— **Heath Adam Ackley**, former theology professor and minister in the Church of the Brethren, now training director for a suicide prevention line for transgender people

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Chaplain Tracy Nolan

Ministry with trans people

TRACY NOLAN, a minister in the United Church of Christ, works with trans young people as a pediatric chaplain at Advocate Children's Hospital in Park Ridge, Illinois. She has also served at a drop-in ministry in Chicago for LGBTQ youth.

How would you differentiate between these terms—sex, gender identity, gender expression, and sexual orientation?

Sex is typically assigned to each individual at birth based on a set of biological characteristics, such as chromosomes, reproductive organs, and hormones. But these biological categories aren't always clear. Some people are born with biological characteristics that don't fit the boxes: external or internal organs, hormone sensitivities, genetics, or other characteristics that don't fit neatly into the categories *male* and *female*. The term *intersex* is used for folks in this category.

Gender identity is an internal sense of self not assigned by someone else or connected to biological characteristics. It can be invisible.

Gender expression is the external manifestations of one's gender identity. It's what we show the world through our hair or clothes or mannerisms. Different cultures have different assumptions about what makes certain gender expressions "male" or "female."

Sexual orientation is not dependent on gender identity. Sexual orientation is about physical, emotional, and romantic attraction; it answers the question "Who am I attracted to?" not "Who am I?"

Why do these different categories matter, and why is it important to keep them distinct?

We can cause people a lot of harm when we blur these categories. Sex may not match gender identity. Likewise, a gender identity doesn't necessarily entail a particular sexual orientation.

We generally think of sex, gender identity, gender expression, and sexual orientation as fixed in some way. What does it mean that they are changeable or fluid?

It comes down to dissolving binary ways of thinking. Some people experience their gender or sexual orientation as set and unchanging. Others experience their gender or sexual orientation as changing: perhaps earlier in life they dated women and

JUSTINE BURSON PHOTOGRAPHY



now they date female-to-male trans folks exclusively. Such persons may or may not say that their sexual orientation has changed. They may say that their sexual orientation is fluid. That doesn't make their orientation less valid or real, nor does it make it a "phase."

Similarly, not all people who identify as trans would say, "I knew from birth I was in the wrong body." While some people experience their trans identity as linear and moving to an ultimate goal of being confirmed in their internal gender identity, others see their gender identity as something that changes or shifts, without a defined goal. A nonbinary and nonlinear understanding of gender identity challenges some core assumptions about gender and deeply challenges the language we use about gender.

American society has moved toward a greater acceptance and understanding of gay and lesbian people and of the idea that same-sex attraction is the result of sexual orientation. Does that move help or hinder people in understanding transgender people?

The idea of a "sexual orientation" implies something fixed and unchangeable. It brings to mind arguments like "I was born this way." While this argument has helped trans folks gain acceptance in some ways, it has hindered other trans folks from finding acceptance, since not all trans folks would identify with the idea of transitioning from one gender to the opposite binary gender.

People distressed with the sex or gender assigned them at birth are said to experience gender dysphoria. Is it helpful or problematic that gender dysphoria is an official psychiatric diagnosis according to the latest edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*?

What is now categorized as gender dysphoria used to be called gender identity disorder. The move away from "disorder" language was seen by many people as a positive step, but some people feel that listing trans experience as a psychiatric diagnosis at all, whether as "dysphoria" or a "disorder," pathologizes trans identity. Others see the current category as an imperfect solution to the need for medical language that allows insurance companies to cover gender surgeries.

What's at stake for transgender teenagers who are told which school bathrooms they can and can't use?

Transgender teens could better answer this question than I can. But broadly speaking, there's a lot at stake. To be told by someone that "you don't belong here" in the most basic level of human functioning—going to the bathroom—is to be told you aren't worth making space for. It's important to empower young people to speak about their needs and to listen to them. Making space to meet someone's needs is a way of loving them and telling them they are lovable and worthy. The rhetoric that surrounds some conversations about bathrooms and trans folks creates a toxic environment not only for trans folks but for every person in that community.

In your experience, what role has religious belief played for people undergoing gender transitions?

I have met some young people who felt religion was totally irrelevant to their understanding of their gender identity. Others experience religion and gender identity as connected, sometimes positively and sometimes negatively. Sometimes

"There's much strength already present in trans folks."

faith has been a helpful way to mark transition points; other times it has felt like a hindrance in transitioning. I would encourage pastors simply to listen well to each person they encounter.

How can a minister be helpful to transgender people who seek pastoral care?

When talking to a person who identifies as trans, use the pronouns and name that the person asks you to use. When in doubt, ask. If you make a mistake, apologize and move on.

Consider how you might be perceived as a minister. Identify yourself as a safe person through your language and interaction.

Don't assume that someone who identifies as trans is broken or needs pity.

Pay attention to how you might advocate for someone—but first offer and ask their permission. Some may not want your advocacy, or it might not be safe for them to be public about their trans identity.

Don't "out" anyone. Their story is theirs to share, and they may not share it with everyone for very valid reasons.

A trans person's story has some unique elements, but the work of pastoral care remains essentially the same for all: exploring people's understanding of themselves, the world, and God; noticing emotions, experiences, grief, joy, and the impact of self-understanding on relationships and life events; and considering areas of support, whether that of a biological or chosen family, friends, mentors, counselors, role models, online communities, teachers, or a faith community.

What are some of the lessons you've learned from working with gender nonconforming and transgender patients?

I've learned not to assume that someone is in need of help (healing, reconciliation, or advocacy) just because they identify as trans. People are resilient. Trans folks have figured out how to thrive in a world whose gender norms often grate against their very existence. There's a lot of strength already present in trans folks, and reminding people of their resilience is an important pastoral task in itself.

How might Christians support the safety and health of transgender people, both those who are public about their experience and those who are not?

Ministers can consider how gender is listed on church forms, used in hymns, or impacts youth programming. Preachers can refer to trans identities in their sermons in an affirming and normalizing way. Church bathrooms can be unisex or family. A trans flag can be added next to the rainbow flag on the church marquee. Churches can participate in or host events with trans organizations.

At the local, regional, national, and international levels, Christians can support policy, legislation, and human rights standards that uphold the rights of individuals who identify as transgender. This might mean engaging in conversations at the school board to encourage policies that respect trans students, supporting an advocacy organization in letter writing, or advocating for insurance coverage for gender confirmation surgery on church health insurance plans.

—Elizabeth Palmer

The still pilgrim ponders a paradox

"As an earthling, you are traveling in space at this very moment at a speed of 67,000 miles per hour on the ancient pilgrimage of Earth's 365 day journey around our daystar, the sun."

—Edward Hays, *A Pilgrim's Almanac*

Who knew that stillness could be so fleet?

The ancient oak an athlete.

The garden wall stacked brick on brick

a staunch imposter, heretic

devoted to the need for speed.

With planted feet you still exceed

the jet plane's thrust, the bullet's hustle.

And yet you do not move a muscle.

This world was never made for rest.

From north to south, from east to west

all living things traverse

while hurtling through the universe.

And still you stay as still can be

unmoved by your velocity.

Angela Alaimo O'Donnell

My time at a refugee camp in Greece

Waiting in Malakasa

by Arianne Zwartjes

PULLING INTO a dusty dirt lot an hour north of Athens, all I could see was metal fencing and squat yellow army buildings. As other volunteers greeted each other in Greek, we showed our IDs to the army guards and walked past them along one of the fences.

The refugee camp was on the site of an old army facility. A few steps beyond the barracks, I saw row upon row of white tents, fences strung with drying laundry, concrete-block warehouses, and everywhere dust and more dust. People walked slowly in the heat: women carrying plastic tubs of laundry, men lounging against railings, children moving in small clusters amid the trees at the edge of the camp. In front of the medical clinic a small line of people had formed, waiting in the beating sun to see the Greek army doctors.

This was my first morning in the refugee camp outside the small Greek town of Malakasa, a camp populated almost entirely by people who had fled Afghanistan. I had traveled to Greece after watching the refugee crisis unfold for months from the vantage point of my apartment in the southern Netherlands. I followed news of it obsessively, and finally decided I had to do what little I could to help the refugees arriving on Greece's shores.

As I walked around that morning with Angeliki, a Greek woman from the nearby town of Oropos who was a volunteer at the camp, I reflected on the ease of my travel to Greece. Flying from Eindhoven, I never showed an ID of any kind. I didn't have a bag to check, and I breezed through security with a quick flash of my boarding pass. And yet, for the thousands of refugees in Greece, waiting in refugee camps, no passage of any kind was possible. *Schengen*—Europe's system of borderless travel—applies only for some.

I had come to Malakasa to volunteer in the medical clinic. I quickly learned that the clinic was staffed by army doctors who worked only one day a month at the camp. There was no consistency and limited record-keeping from day to day. One or two doctors and a couple of medical students or residents would show up in the morning, unprepared, and do their best. Most of them were not general practitioners, so this kind of clinical setting was far outside of their training and range of experience, particularly with language and cultural barriers added in—as well as the stark physical realities of life in a refugee camp, which the doctors knew little about. Many of the camp's inhabitants desperately needed pediatricians and OB/GYN care, specializations that do not exist in the army medical corps.

It became clear after a day in the clinic that I could be of more use out walking around the camp, going from tent to tent. With the help of a young woman named Gulcheen, I ended up going around to find all the pregnant women in the camp, collecting their names, gathering information on their pregnancies and health risks, and giving out prenatal vitamins that had been donated from Germany. These vitamins with folic acid and iron were an important resource for the pregnant women; the diet in the camp was not great—gooey rice with a sauce or chicken on it—and the army wouldn't allow donations of meals from outside because they feared that anti-immigrant groups might send in poisoned food.

I walked around giving vitamins to pregnant women.

Going from tent to tent, Gulcheen and I were often invited in; the families gave us tea and biscuits and boxes of juice that they'd been given by the volunteers. They told us their stories: how and why they came to this place, the travails they'd experienced in their journeys through the mountains of Afghanistan and Iran, Iraq and Turkey, and then crossing the sea to reach Greece.

They had made their tents as homey as they were able: blankets, which they also slept on, lined the floors, and clothes and any other belongings were stacked in corners of the tent. Some of them had small trinkets hanging from the ceiling; none had lights, and at night the camp was pitch dark.

One afternoon, a young woman I will call Salima invited me into her family's tent. Her parents and siblings graciously scooted farther back into the shelter so I could slip off my shoes in the entrance and duck inside. We sat cross-legged in a circle on layers of rough gray blankets—the ubiquitous gray blankets that every aid organization gives out—and they offered me tea and cookies.

Salima had worked in Kabul for the Afghanistan Workforce Development Program, a project of the United States Agency for International Development. She had applied to come to the United States through a program available to Iraqi and Afghan interpreters and others who work for the U.S. military. She and

Arianne Zwartjes's most recent book is Detailing Trauma: A Poetic Anatomy.



REFUGEE IN GREECE: Afghan refugee children play outside a tent in a refugee camp in Malakasa, 40 kilometers north of Athens. Hundreds of thousands of refugees have passed through Greece in recent years, and about 70,000 remain.

her family had fled before the process was complete, when their circumstances turned dangerous.

She pulled out her preciously guarded, somewhat worn file of paperwork, with several letters from her supervisors at USAID extolling her virtues as an employee. Her parents smiled and nodded at me, the corners of their eyes crinkling. My Dari is limited to a few simple words such as *salaam* (hello) and *tashakur* (thank you), and their command of English was about the same.

Then Salima pulled out her phone. Her younger brother, she said, had been killed by the Taliban in retribution for her work for the United States—that was the reason they'd had to escape the country. She brought up a photo of him and held it out to me: a young man, younger than she, lay supine, pale, his chest bare and bloody and scored with open wounds. Salima scrolled through photo after photo of his body—pointing out his wounds, describing how they'd killed him in the street. The photos seemed a tribute and a way to mourn, but also invaluable evidence to support the family's refugee status and claims for asylum.

Before I left the Malakasa camp, I jotted down a list of what refugees needed there: they desperately needed a pediatrician and an OB/GYN to make consistent visits and access to a dentist. They needed better shade or air-conditioned indoor spaces, for it was clear that the summer heat was going to become nearly unbearable for the many elders, small children, and newborns. They needed education about their legal rights, which the army was keeping under tight wraps. They needed more showers and toilets; there were only seven showers and 11 toilets for

a camp of over a thousand people. At another makeshift camp, at the Port of Piraeus in Athens, which I also visited, the squalor and chaos were much worse: there were few toilets, few or no showers; hundreds of people living inside the terminal; hundreds more living outside in dirty, somewhat ragged tents.

While camp conditions were not ideal, I was struck by the generosity and hospitality of the Greek people, particularly given the current levels of economic hardship in Greece. Several times at Malakasa I saw young soldiers sneak up to one of the Greek volunteers and hand them bags of food they'd brought from home to share with the people in the camp; they didn't want to be seen by the higher-ups giving it out themselves. And people from nearby communities sent medications and other supplies with the Greek volunteers almost every day—razors, a trash bag of T-shirts, a basket of apples if they could get them past the guards. I heard stories of elderly Greek people who had driven hours just to deliver a small box of food to one of the camps. Nonetheless, there are immense structural and organizational challenges in all the camps and squats and a very limited sense of agency for any of the people living there.

The Greek volunteers I met thought that the Greek government could be far more effective than it was. The problem is not capacity. The problem is political at its root: no one wants to absorb the refugees, in part because no one wants to encourage more people to come.

The intended discouragement, however, seems not to have prevented the flow of boats into Italy and Spain. Since my visit, there have been slow steps forward: almost all the residents of

Malakasa have been “pre-registered” by the Greek Asylum Service and the UNHCR, and some of them have actually begun the process of registering for asylum in Greece (though registering by no means guarantees that asylum will be granted). The process continues at a glacial pace, and the prospects for thousands of people to find jobs in a Greece that has already been brought to its knees by EU austerity policies are not promising.

Malakasa is almost exclusively populated by Afghans, for example, while the broader refugee populations come from Syria and Iraq, among other places. Of these, Afghans face a particularly difficult path. Afghans have recently been excluded from the list of nationalities eligible for the European Relocation program. And since October, an EU-Afghanistans “Joint Way Forward” agreement allows countries in the EU to deport Afghan asylum-seekers back to Afghanistan. Only people from Syria, Eritrea, Burundi, Mozambique, Bahrain, Bhutan, Qatar, and Yemen are eligible for relocation in Europe; the rest have, until now, had the option of attempting to claim asylum in Greece or of being returned to Turkey, which has been accused of some very troubling actions against refugees in recent months, including arrests, beatings, and forced relocations.

Many people in Malakasa told me of the violence that had forced them to leave. Like Salima and her family, they fled to preserve their lives after a direct threat or the killing of a family member. Many of the Afghans I spoke with at Malakasa were Hazara, a Shi’a minority group in Afghanistan that is

specifically targeted by Taliban and al-Qaeda forces. These were not “economic migrants.”

Even if they had been, the line between an economic refugee and one fleeing violence is very thin. Being deprived of food, shelter, and opportunities to work are certainly another form of violence. And those without economic means are at a much higher risk of experiencing physical violence. Current international agreements on refugees do not acknowledge these realities, nor do they address historical exploitation of certain populations.

Trying to help in a situation like the one in Greece raises a pyramid of questions, one built atop the other. I began by asking *How can I, in an immediate sense, best help the people here?* but that quickly turned into *Why are they stuck here in this camp, and how can we change that?* That question grows into *Where does Europe draw the lines about who can seek asylum and who cannot?* which spirals into *Why are we privileging the devastation of war on people's lives over the arguably just as devastating effects of economic privation?* and *What do we do with this world constructed on such massive global systems of inequality?* Each question seems overwhelming in its own right, but each is necessary—even critical—to ask.

The worldwide refugee crisis is not likely to get better anytime soon. Last year, global levels of forced displacement reached the highest level ever recorded. According to 2015 UNHCR statistics, “one in every 113 people on earth is either an asylum-seeker, internally displaced, or a refugee.” With such high levels of instability in the Middle East, south-central Asia, and northern Africa, the trend is unlikely to end. The UNHCR and other researchers have also warned that severe weather, disasters, drought, and food shortages due to global climate change will create a drastic increase in displaced communities. The issue of how to help refugees will only become more salient in our near future. And with the election of Donald Trump, it will almost certainly become more difficult for refugees to come to the United States.

In recent months, many people have become deeply disheartened or even cynical about the prospect of change being made within government, and we also, perhaps, are a little disenchanted with old-school activism: protests in the streets, petitions, letter writing, and so on. But so much of creating political pressure has to do with building networks that often take years to build—and this is an area that our religious communities can excel in.

The need for creative and sustained response to the global refugee crisis is stronger than ever. The answers will not be simple and will not come from only one place: we must keep asking the questions.



Susan Sohl: "Polyhymnia"

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Faith MATTERS

by Carol Zaleski

The Buddha and the Pantocrator

I'M SITTING in front of my computer drinking from a knobby, lopsided Japanese tea bowl, with two new books on either side of my keyboard. At my left hand is William Empson's *The Face of the Buddha*, edited by Buddhist scholar-monk Rupert Arrowsmith from a long-lost manuscript. At my right hand is *The Art of Seeing: Paradox and Perception in Orthodox Iconography*, by the Orthodox monk-scholar Fr. Maximos Conostas. The books are mirror opposites; I wish the authors could meet.

Many consider William Empson the best critic of his generation. His first book, *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, which he began at the tender age of 22, plumbed the English poetic canon for tantalizing examples of verbal ambiguity—cases in which a word or expression yields alternative meanings, to the puzzlement of the attentive critic and the delight of the deep reader. Empson was a figure of ambiguity himself, a profound exegete of Christian literature and a passionate anti-Christian. He loved to unearth evidence that his favorite English authors were conflicted about their faith, that the ambiguities in *Paradise Lost* were symptomatic of Milton's struggle to make a tyrannical God seem worthy of worship, that the double meaning of a word as innocuous as *buckle* revealed Gerard Manley Hopkins's mixed feelings about his Jesuit calling, that George Herbert's poem "The Sacrifice" exposed a two-faced God: vindictive judge and loving redeemer.

What had promised to be a spectacular academic career ran aground early on when a servant found contraceptives in Empson's college rooms and the young prodigy was expelled in disgrace. But the exile proved fruitful; after a stint among the Bloomsbury literati, Empson found teaching jobs in Japan and China. Here, amid the gracious statues of Buddha and bodhisattvas, he discovered a type of ambiguity that was free from neuralgic Christian associations. Studying the Kudara Kannon in Nara's Hōryū-ji Temple, he marveled at the "puzzlement and good humour" on the left side of the face and the "birdlike innocence and wakefulness" on the right. He became fascinated to the point of obsession, crisscrossing the Asian continent in search of statues that shared the same secret: "the faces all seem to be asymmetrical in the same way, as if the artists were working on a theory." To test the theory, Empson would photograph a Buddha's face, split the photograph down the middle, reverse one side, and create two mirrored composites. The asymmetries were unmistakable. One face appeared sardonic on the right side, mystical on the left; another cunning on the right side, placid on the left; yet another "masculine and foxy" on the right side, plaintive on the left. Overall, the asymmetries created an impression of ironic wisdom

coupled with compassion, and marked by a certain "coolness" toward the supernatural. "I think Buddhism much better than Christianity," Empson wrote, "because it managed to get away from the Neolithic craving to gloat over human sacrifice."

Fr. Maximos Conostas has an eye for ambiguity as well. For Conostas, the art of the icon requires a certain strangeness, a disruption of the symmetries that naturally please the eye, in order to transport the viewer from the image to its divine original. Nowhere is this strangeness more apparent than in the majestic sixth-century Christ Pantocrator of Sinai, an icon whose asymmetry has been the subject of endless commentary. Using the same split photograph technique, Conostas discovered "a timid, slightly sad-looking young man . . . yearning for contact and love" on one side and "a ponderous Titan, aloof to all relations" on the other. Some interpreters think that this duality is a lesson in Chalcedonian Christology, but Conostas suggests that the real subject is "the paradoxical co-existence of mercy and judgment." The effect is intentionally disturbing: "Beholding the face of Christ, the viewer . . . judges his own likeness poor and disfigured." Yet the ultimate message is a hopeful one, for the tender side of Christ's face, commanding the viewer's left visual field (which is favored, Conostas notes, by our asymmetrical brain), is what unites the composition. It seems that the iconographer instinctively understood how to portray the polarity of divine mercy and judgment in such a way that mercy would be undimmed.

Empson never wholly converted to Buddhism; he returned to England at intervals, taught at various universities in the United States and the U.K., and wrapped up a brilliant, unruly, bohemian life with a knighthood and an honorary fellowship from the college that expelled him. Conostas (now the Very Rev. Archimandrite Maximos Conostas) is at once an American academic and an Athonite monk. The two authors, one a promiscuous literary adventurer, the other a scholarly ascetic, have made a wonderful discovery. But where Conostas sees a saving paradox, Empson sees a damnable contradiction. Where Empson sees a vindictive God, Conostas sees a loving God in whom "Mercy and Truth have met together . . . Righteousness and Bliss have kissed." It's a mystery—here are two intelligent bipeds, symmetrical on the outside and asymmetrical, as we all are, on the inside, who have so much to teach us about the aesthetics of ambiguity; and yet they fall on opposite sides of the great divide.

Carol Zaleski is professor of world religions at Smith College in Northampton, Massachusetts.

IN Review

Thinking with trans

by Leonard Curry

People who don't feel they belong within traditional fixed categories of gender and race daily face Ezekiel's heartrending question: "How, then, shall we live?" Rogers Brubaker doesn't attempt to answer that question on behalf of trans people, but he poses a related question for people who want to make sense of trans experience: How, then, shall we think?

Brubaker begins to answer this question by looking at media coverage and public opinion during the summer of 2015, when Bruce Jenner became a transgender woman named Caitlyn and NAACP chapter president Rachel Dolezal claimed the identity of "transracial" after being outed by her parents as white. The proximity of Jenner's transition and Dolezal's outing led many Americans to pair the two together in their thinking. A debate soon arose in the media, universities, and even popular conversation: If Jenner could be transgender, then could Dolezal be considered transracial?

Brubaker thinks pairing the concepts of transgender and transracial with one another in this way can be useful. He challenges readers to "think with trans" as a way to engage the tensions and ambiguities that undergird how we use racial and gender categories. Brubaker says the debates around Jenner and Dolezal show that Americans are more willing to "think with trans" when it comes to gender than they are regarding race. After Dolezal made news headlines, many Americans flatly stated that "transracial is not a thing."

Brubaker responds by pointing out that the development of transgender discourse has been gradual. Only slowly did transgender identity gain legitimacy. Eventually, transgender *became* a thing. Not everyone is in agreement about it, but there is at least a common vocabulary for talking about it. Brubaker hopes that the same will happen with the concept of transracial identity.

Transgender discourse applies to immensely varied experiences, but Brubaker organizes them into three different kinds. There is the trans of *migration*, which concerns persons who move from one established gender category to another. There is the trans of *between*, which involves persons who do not identify as fully or solely within either of the established gender categories. And there is the trans of *beyond*, which names the experience of those who want nothing at all to do with gender categories.

Brubaker argues that this threefold trans discourse can be used to describe racial identities or experiences as well. The trans of racial migration is represented by the person who passes as a member of another race: for example, the black person who passes as white, or, as in Dolezal's case, the white person who passes as black. The trans of between names multiracial or mixed-race individuals and the political movements enacted in their name. And the trans of beyond represents those who refuse to identify with racial categories and seek to live postracial lives.

Brubaker's analysis is sophisticated,

trans

Gender and Race
in an Age of
Unsettled Identities

Rogers Brubaker

Trans: Gender and Race in an Age of Unsettled Identities

By Rogers Brubaker
Princeton University Press,
256 pp., \$24.95

and it addresses subtle issues. For example, one might argue that transracial migration, or passing, cannot be the same as transgender migration because a transgender person *becomes* the opposite gender, whereas a transracial passer only continues to pass as someone of another race. But Brubaker argues that not every gender or racial migration is openly disclosed, so the logic of passing may apply in both cases.

Further, transgender migration could be seen as creating a new category (*transman* or *transwoman*) instead of moving from one established gender category to another (male to female or female to male). Brubaker notes that the corollary for race would be *transblack* or *transwhite*—terms that many readers have probably never considered, although they are increasingly being claimed by people whose identity doesn't fit neatly into a simple conception of racial passing.

Brubaker maintains that we are living in "an age of unsettled identities." Of that, he convinces me. This book is necessary reading for anyone interested in the categories of identity and how they are being invoked or subverted.

Leonard Curry is an elder in the AME Church and a student at Vanderbilt University.

Grant Park: A Novel

By Leonard Pitts Jr.

Agate Bolden, 408 pp., \$16.00 paperback

It is Tuesday, November 4, 2008: a historic election day. Will America soon have its first African-American president?

In Leonard Pitts's novel, Malcolm Marcus Toussaint is a 60-year-old black newspaper journalist who doesn't think so. Out of patience, out of faith, out of sorts, he has given up "the foolish notion that white people can be redeemed." He is tired of explaining "the same things to white people, year in, year out, over and over again . . . and them not listening." He still has enough energy, however, to defy his employer and sneak a furious rant onto the front page of the morning edition—an act that immediately gets both him and his boss fired.

Dwayne McLarty and Clarence Pym, a mismatched pair of white supremacists, don't think Barack Obama will win the

presidency either. McLarty, a meth addict, and Pym, a loner with a disfiguring disease, want to take America back from blacks, Jews, Muslims, and gays. Whoever wins the election, they plan to send a wake-up call to white Christian America by bombing the crowd awaiting election returns in Chicago's Grant Park.

The story takes off when McLarty and Pym kidnap Toussaint.

After the paperback edition of *Grant Park* was published and Donald Trump was elected president, I went to hear Pitts discuss his novel at a public library. "First, I need to be clear about one thing," he said: "I am not Malcolm Toussaint."

But it's easy to see why readers might confuse the two: both are Pulitzer Prize-winning African-American journalists; both have written extensively on race; both can be angry. In fact, Pitts began his library presentation by read-

Reviewed by LaVonne Neff, who blogs and reviews books at livelydust.blogspot.com.

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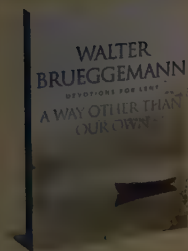


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Faith Matters

Carol Zaleski

"I live in what seems to this New York City native to be a sleepy town in western Massachusetts. They tell me it's a city, but I don't believe it, for it is peopled by people who know one another. And here in this sleepy town—once home to Jonathan Edwards—I am discovering America. After decades immersed in John Henry Newman, J. R. R. Tolkien, C. S. Lewis, and the like, my thoughts have turned to William James and his quintessentially American, characteristically unfinished religious project. Life is quiet; with our boys grown, my husband and I have long hours to devote to plotting our next book. As we sit in our garage-turned-library, a pair of mourning doves keeps sentry on the roof, chipmunks dart in and out of the tall grass, and mosquitoes return to remind us that though blessed, we are still in exile from Eden."

Read Carol's essays in **THE Christian**
CENTURY

ing from a recent and clearly angry column: "I have no interest in seeing this country heal" after "the election of a fundamentally unsound, unserious and unfit man," he wrote. He referred to Trump as "a misogynist who brags about sexual assault, a bigot cheered to victory by the Ku Klux Klan."

The good guys in *Grant Park* are far from perfect, though they sincerely want to make the world a better place. Malcolm, a sanitation worker's son from Memphis, is hot-headed and impatient. In 1968 he was sent home from a prestigious northern university for having painted an obscene slogan on a campus wall. Nonviolent protest was too tame for him: he wanted justice now and was willing to break windows and loot stores to get it. Forty years later, as a celebrated columnist, he downs a few beers and explodes in print.

Malcolm's white boss, Bob Carson, a dentist's son from Minneapolis, is obtuse and disillusioned. In 1968 he considered himself a revolutionary. Though in love

with an African-American woman, he repeatedly offended her with his assumptions of white privilege. Forty years later, Bob fears he has become the man he never wanted to be: a racist. He has lost patience with black people "constantly whining about this injustice or that unfairness." Nowadays, he thinks, a black man can be rich, famous, even a candidate for president. What more do African Americans want?

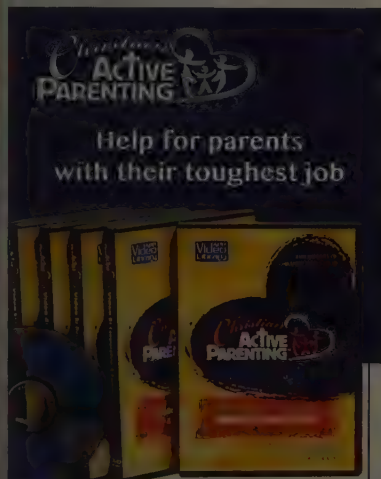
Two women play important supporting. Like Malcolm and Bob, Janeka Lattimore marched in Memphis in 1968. A sixtyish black woman, she works on minority outreach for Obama and tries to help Bob understand how the world looks to African Americans. Amy Lanningham is a young white journalist at the *Post*. She carefully pays attention to other people's experiences and feelings. When Malcolm speaks, she listens. When need arises, she acts.

Yes, *Grant Park* is a didactic novel. In a pivotal scene in which Malcolm shares a boiled egg with Martin Luther

King Jr., for example, the civil rights leader kindly and patiently explains to Malcolm why violence is not the answer. When Bob and Janeka meet for lunch 40 years after their breakup, the black woman kindly and patiently listens to the white man's outbursts about race, occasionally interjecting to show where he has gone off track.

Some readers may fault Pitts for his obvious attempts to educate; I found the story so compelling that I barely noticed how much I was learning. *Grant Park* is about lovers with irreconcilable differences who nevertheless continue to reach out to each other. It's about fathers and sons whose mutual loyalty survives the collision of their separate worlds. Above all, it's a fast-paced thriller with guns, bombs, explosions, drugs, speeding cars, and homicide. This book will keep you up past your bedtime.

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The day before the 2008 election, Malcolm says he's "sick and tired of white folks' bullshit." After the votes are tallied and Obama becomes president-elect, Bob rejoices that the country is changing. "All that old racial stuff, we're moving beyond that," he exults. For Bob's sake, Malcolm tries to believe him.

If the characters were transported to 2017, no doubt Bob would be astonished at the election of Trump, whereas Malcolm would not be even mildly surprised.

As I write, yet another jury has refused to convict a police officer for shooting an unarmed, fleeing black man. In a December 6 column, Pitts wrote, "Lord, I am just tired. . . . You get tired of being disappointed, you know? You get sick of being let down."

"I know that probably, eventually, my elders will beguile me back into faith, convince me there are reasons to keep hammering at America's ideals, or stand for America's song," Pitts wrote. "But in this moment of fresh betrayal? Sorry, elders. I'm damned if I can think of one."

The Matter of Voice: Sensual Soundings

By Karmen MacKendrick
Fordham University Press, 216 pp.,
\$25.00 paperback

I'm deeply ambivalent about my speaking voice. On the one hand, my voice is a small miracle. Vocalizing requires an incredibly broad range of activities, including muscles, nerves, and the brain. It requires all of the senses, even touch. Indeed, lacking touch, a voice cannot form recognizable sounds particularly well (something those of us who have experienced a shot of Novocain at the dentist can recall).

On the other hand, I wish my voice sounded more like the rich baritone of Morgan Freeman's, and not so much like the nasal, middle-register voice that I have—a voice I suspect is more effective at communicating with furry creatures than with my fellow humans.

This ambivalence is not mine alone. It is a theme that in part undergirds Karmen MacKendrick's book. She meditates on the sensuality of the human voice, both spoken and written. The voice is largely ignored in philosophical thought, shoved aside in the search for objectivity; MacKendrick plays with the idea that the "voice is what resists the reduction of word to concept." The human voice is reducible neither to mere body nor to mere thought; rather, it fully participates in the act of making meaning. A voice is one's own, but not identical with the self (hence the foreignness of hearing a recording of one's voice). It is a physical, bodily trait, but it requires mental and spiritual capabilities. In its most basic form, a voice erupts outward, affecting others, calling forth a

Reviewed by Peder Jothen, who teaches religion at St. Olaf College in Northfield, Minnesota, and is the author of Kierkegaard, Aesthetics, and Selfhood (Routledge).

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response. It both calls and responds, both speaks and listens, always a partner in searching for God.

A professor of philosophy at Le Moyne College, MacKendrick has written a book that twists and turns in conversation with figures like Augustine, Hildegard of Bingen, Nietzsche, Jean-Luc Nancy, and Jacques Derrida. She critiques the view that the voice is merely a delivery device for ideas. Rather, as relational, the voice intertwines with words and a listener. It makes meaning because within it is the power of breath, part divine and part human. As God gives us breath, in using our voice we mingle the divine with the world. Doing so also rests upon the mythic notion of an original language, one that harkens back to Genesis and a God who gives us the language to voice our desires and thoughts. The voice, through tone, silence, and song, is more than a means for the transmission of words. The voice frames our experience of the world as meaningful because it allows our bodies to participate, interpret, form, and reform the materiality of the world as full of divine presence.

MacKendrick stresses the human distance from and inability to possess the divine—an awareness that opens up a space for multiple ways of doing theology. This view then creates an opening to recognize that our desire to vocalize the mystery of divinity pulls us into multiple ways of relating to God. She threads this view into several different human activities that require thoughtfulness about voice: writing, pedagogy, translation, cosmology, semiotics, and music.

The book's constructive proposal stresses that voices allow our bodies to become the locus for meaningful conversations about God. These events arise through our speaking, writing, teaching, and singing, among other acts, with each voice echoing out to call others (as well as respond to others) in an exploration of divinity. Such meaning making is particularly heightened when we sing. In singing we emotively experience the vocalization of the intimate mystery of divine presence without being entangled in a quest for certainty and clarity.

At times, MacKendrick's voice is overly clever, too stylistic and rhythmic rather than focused on clearly articulating her argument. And the arc of the book, based on five previously published essays, feels disjointed (especially in comparison to the elegance of her *Divine Enticement*). But the thread that knits the text together is valuable: she calls us to care about the movement of our voices, the multiple ways we use them, and the embodied conversations that burst forth as we live out our desire for God.

MacKendrick asks us to appreciate the rhythm that each voice taps out and the multiple ways these rhythms draw us together as voices, desires, and bodies. She reminds us of the wonder of creation and of having a sensual voice in the first place. In the midst of our ambivalence about our voices, this book calls us to be joyful in our corporeality, ever aware that our voices matter.

Assimilate or Go Home: Notes from a Failed Missionary

D. L. Mayfield

HarperOne, 224 pp., \$14.99 paperback

Most of the essays in this artfully composed collection are structured according to the same plot: a well-meaning missionary is turned inside out and upside down by the harsh realities of the mission field. At first read the repetition grated. I expected D. L. Mayfield to provide an overarching story, a narrative thread. I wanted the narrator to play the part of protagonist, overcoming hardship to claim victory in the end. But this isn't how it works, especially not for a self-avowed "failure."

At one point Mayfield reflects upon

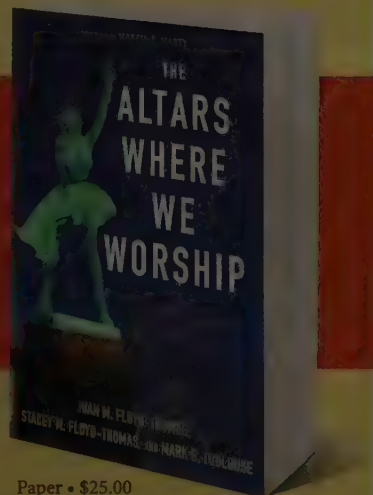
Reviewed by Katherine Willis Pershey, who is an associate minister at the First Congregational Church in Western Springs, Illinois.

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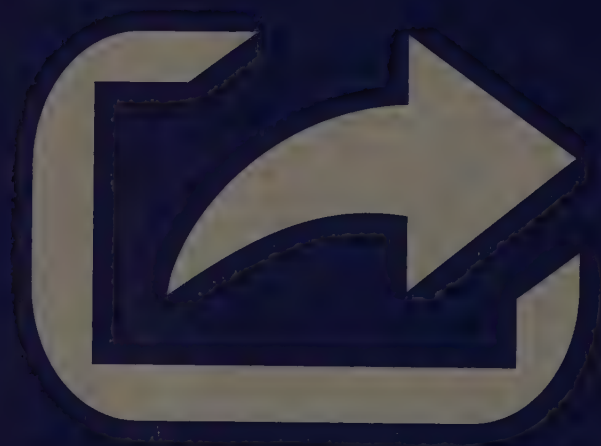
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her missionary colleagues who have been at work far longer than she, the people who have “seen stories as they really are: long term and full of miracles and crushing disappointments, a constant tale of being saved and relapsing back into ourselves.” These are the kinds of stories Mayfield tells. You don’t get from her happy endings and tidy morality tales. You get theological and ethical ambiguity. You also get extremely uncomfortable with your own extremely comfortable life (if, like me, you are a reader who lives with relative privilege).

Mayfield presumed as a child that her missionary aspirations would take her overseas. Instead, she finds herself involved—an insufficient word if there ever was one—with the Somali Bantu refugee community in her hometown. As is frequently the case with vulnerable and economically disadvantaged groups, the refugees who land in Portland, Oregon, land in the margins.

Mayfield describes dilapidated community centers, cockroach-infested kitchens, apartment complexes seemingly unfit for habitation. “The deeper you went into the complexes, the more the curtain of the Western world fell away: here, time stood still. Nobody had cars, nobody had jobs: everyone came with their culture weighing heavily on their backs and precious little more.”

Mayfield is a visitor into this world, and she quickly becomes dissatisfied with being more tourist than true missionary. She therefore does something mildly radical in a culture that values

upward mobility: she moves into the neighborhood, opting to live among the people she feels called to serve.

Before you roll your eyes and write Mayfield off as a well-meaning but ill-advised do-gooder, know that Mayfield has already rolled her eyes at herself. At times she is scathing in her self-critique. She reveals the underside of her missionary zeal. There is a part of her that isn’t there out of love for Jesus or concern for the poor, but because she wants to be known as an extraordinarily faithful Christian. “I didn’t see how I placed myself at the top and was eager for others to do the same. I didn’t see how that meant my neighbors and refugee friends became my stepping stones in attaining the love of God; I didn’t see how it meant that I was using everyone around me in real and devastating ways.”

Having developed an aversion to such casual exploitation, Mayfield becomes frustrated by the fresh-faced youth groups who show up to offer tone-deaf and presumptuous vacation Bible schools to the children of the projects only to disappear back into the suburbs at the end of the week. She even stops inviting her own friends to volunteer for refugee support programs, having grown weary of their tendency to pop in just long enough to take selfies of themselves in action before losing interest in the enterprise.

Although she does become credentialed to teach English as a second language, the lion’s share of Mayfield’s ministry is neither teaching nor preach-

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ing. "I have the much less interesting spiritual gift of showing up and sitting on couches." She never really knows if her presence is effective in any way and generally suspects that it's not. Still, she is utterly committed to abiding with her friends in the margins, even if it means that her most tangible offering is a steady stream of her Funfetti cupcakes.

Upon baking a batch for a woman who was "moving away to be with a man I was sure was the cause of all her hurts and bruises," Mayfield wonders, "How much longer can I keep making these damn cupcakes?" Her cupcakes aren't saving anyone from abusive relationships. They aren't creating opportunities for disenfranchised youth. They aren't even emblazoned with "JESUS LOVES YOU" in pink gel frosting. They are literally just cupcakes. Empty calories. But they are the symbol of everything this "failed missionary" has become, all that she has learned in her

long, open-ended sojourn among the "least of these." "As it turns out, I never did magically turn into one of my missionary heroes. Instead, I'm just somebody who likes to bake cakes." Somebody who likes to bake cakes—and be in real relationship, and bear witness to the kingdom of God.

"The world is so much worse than we would like to believe," Mayfield muses. This is what I suspect, and what I fear. "And God is so much wilder than we are being taught. We can study the kingdom of God, but we can never contain or subdue it. Reading about it will never equal the experience of it. That we must discover for ourselves, and we will find it where God always said it would be: on the margins, in the upside-down kingdom."

This, too, is what I suspect. And, as I rest easy on the laurels of my privilege and possessions and cockroach-free kitchen, this too is what I fear.

BookMarks

Galatians

By Nancy Elizabeth Bedford
Westminster John Knox,

248 pp., \$40.00

Theologian Nancy Elizabeth Bedford dives deeply into the "reservoir of meaning" that resides in Galatians, drawing on a wide variety of sources. For example, her interpretation of Galatians 5:16–21 contains discussions of Kathryn Tanner's writings on the Spirit, Jerome's asceticism, waterboarding, paramilitary interrogations in Latin America, Kelly Brown Douglas's critique of Platonic dualism, Christology, human sexuality, Theodoret of Cyrus on idolatry, misogyny, racism, heterosexism, and the *imago dei*. Bedford concludes this section: "For supposed followers of Jesus to treat others with disdain and simultaneously to claim with impunity the inheritance of God's kingdom would put God in a position of complicity with oppression and injustice."

The Art of the Bible: Illuminated Manuscripts from the Medieval World

By Scot McKendrick and Kathleen Doyle
Thames & Hudson, 336 pp., \$95.00

This gorgeous oversized book shows how the Bible functions as art, art as interpretation, and interpretation as evangelism. Vivid colors adorn full-page reproductions of medieval illuminated manuscripts from the British Library's collection. The accompanying commentary by scholars Scot McKendrick and Kathleen Doyle highlights the manuscripts' history and artistic details. The 45 manuscript reproductions in the book span a thousand years and a wide geographic swath of the early Christian world. They also span much of the Bible's narrative: Adam and Eve eat the fruit while the serpent lingers; Boaz observes as Ruth threshes; Jesus is born in a stable; flames adorn disciples at the first Pentecost; the seven-headed beast looms.

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Comic book truth

In 2015, Ta-Nehisi Coates won the National Book Award for *Between the World and Me* and took home a MacArthur “genius” grant. Toni Morrison dubbed him “the intellectual heir of James Baldwin.” What does a cultural critic with that kind of pedigree do next? Write comic books.

In 2016 Marvel Comics published nine new *Black Panther* comic books written by Coates, with more to follow. The Black Panther was the first black superhero in the Marvel universe, alter ego of T’Challa, protector and king of Wakanda, a fictional African country that is the most technologically advanced in the world. Its violent use of power has endangered the vulnerable, and the Black Panther is struggling to control revolutionary factions. Among these factions are the lovers/warriors Ayo and Aneka, who fight under the banner, “No one man,” and Tetu, a revolutionary shaman propelled to violence by the memories of Wakanda’s violence. At the center of the story is a nation that no longer wants a king, and a king who no longer knows why a king is needed.

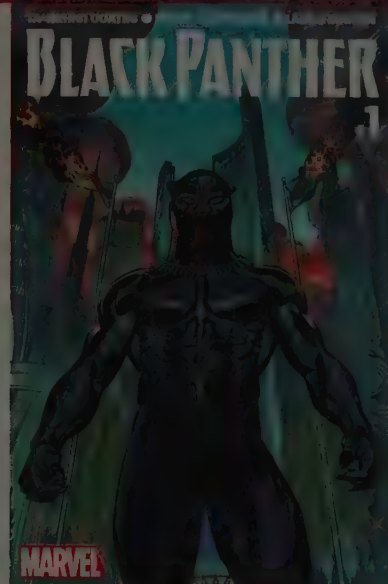
Like much of Coates’s work, the comic books investigate the ways in which power is seized, owned, abused, and rejected. The *Black Panther* comics complicate typical comic tropes. Is the woman who opens others’ eyes to their rage and shame a hero or a villain? Is the revolutionary who kills for the rights of people a freedom fighter or a terrorist?

Questions of justice get the same

complex treatment. Coates has deep wells of empathy for anyone who has to fight for security, opportunity, and liberty. But while he is concerned with democracy, monarchy, and nation making, his comics are best when he’s discussing the relational motivations that propel human life. Although filled with superheroes and mutants, *Black Panther* is a story about humans struggling with family, shame, duty, anger, and sadness. It’s everyday stuff in an extraordinary world.

Coates recognizes the value of comics to help us reconcile truth claims in a radically diverse world. After all, diversity and difference are inherent to comics. There’s no single Black Panther, for example, but many versions of him. Coates does not own the character; he is one steward. Like other comic book writers, he is bound by the storytelling conventions of the genre but can shape the story to say something true. Every superhero has multiple authors and therefore multiple lives. The point is not to reconcile these lives but to add to them. The comic book assumes that we grow closer to understanding with each addition. In this way, they retrieve an oral tradition that passes on stories, characters, and history so that these stories can be refashioned and reformed. Each story told is an invitation to tell another.

In the Jewish and Christian traditions, as in the comic book tradition, we often have multiple narratives trying to answer one question. In Genesis, for example, we



STORYTELLING: Ta-Nehisi Coates has written nine new *Black Panther* comic books—with more to follow.

have two narratives about the creation of the world. Is God the eternal engineer of reality—speaking creation into being? Or is God the sensitive sculptor—shaping humans out of the red clay of the ground? One great gift of the ancient Hebrew storytellers is that they were willing to have both narratives at the table. Both truths are allowed, even though they may be found in contradiction.

We might say that comic books call us back to a world where the veracity of our lives and histories are negotiated in story and song. Stories don’t compete so much as coexist. They aren’t finished; they are passed down and passed on. A new story is not a threat to the order but a widening of the grand story that contains the multitudinous experience of a people. In a world that seems to be fracturing under the weight of its plurality, we will not find a common universal truth by culling out all of the stories that aren’t true. Instead, we can tell more true stories, adding to the growing library of the world and moving closer to that truth.

The author is Adam Hearlson, who is a professor of preaching and worship at Andover Newton Theological School and the cohost of Technicolor Jesus, a podcast about movies, ministry, and preaching.

A woman with long dark hair, wearing glasses and a patterned scarf, is looking down at a book she is holding. The background is a soft, out-of-focus green. The text "PUT THE CENTURY IN THE HANDS OF TOMORROW'S LEADERS" is overlaid on the image. "CENTURY" is in yellow, while the other words are in white.

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by Philip Jenkins

Ethiopia's martyred monks

Christians have always remembered their martyrs, but they do so selectively. Some martyr stories resonate less with the faithful than others, often because they do not contribute so powerfully to addressing current concerns. Racial factors also play a role in how memories are built and preserved.

Italian television recently broadcast a heartrending documentary about one of the largest single acts of mass Christian martyrdom in the 20th century. This happened in 1937 when soldiers and militias slaughtered some 300 Ethiopian monks at one of the country's holiest religious houses. In this instance, the perpetrators were neither communists nor Islamists but Catholic Italians, serving the fascist regime of Benito Mussolini. That massacre at Debre Libanos was one instance in a larger campaign of several years' duration in which Ethiopian monasteries and churches were systematically bombed and subjected to mustard gas attacks. Outside Ethiopia, the persecutions remain largely unknown.

In popular memory, fascist Italy has always been regarded as a less pernicious member of the Axis powers, but in his colonial policies Mussolini yielded nothing to Hitler. In 1935, Italy invaded Ethiopia, and in the words of its local commander, Rodolfo Graziani, "the Duce will have Ethiopia, with or without the Ethiopians."

The savage Italian cam-

paign ultimately killed several hundred thousand Ethiopians—some sources say a million. Graziani envisaged the extermination of all local chiefs and elites, much as Hitler would later attempt in Poland. Given the profound identification of the Ethiopian church with national spirit, Italian forces particularly targeted religious establishments.

Following a 1937 attempt to assassinate Graziani, thousands of Ethiopians were murdered in Addis Ababa on a day that the country still recalls by its date, Yekatit 12. Graziani ordered special retaliation against the monastic house he suspected was involved, namely, Debre Libanos. Founded in the 13th century, the monastery enjoyed immense prestige as a pilgrimage shrine and center of scholarship, and its abbot was the second most powerful figure in the nation's church.

All the monks were killed, and by a dreadful coincidence the murders occurred on the feast day of the house's founding saint. Other massacres around the same time killed several hundred deacons and laypeople. (I am using Ian Campbell's authoritative reconstruction of the incidents.)

People around the world soon found out about these atrocities. Although this was the age before cable news, global media were quite sophisticated, and Ethiopia

was a center of political attention. Yet although Americans and French people heard about the mass murders and the gas attacks, they virtually never placed them in a religious context. We hear of Ethiopians being killed, but usually in the context of "natives" or "tribesmen," rarely as "Christian monks," still less as martyrs. The political left denounced fascists for their brutality, while many on the right were quite unconcerned about violence against colonial insurgents. Nobody at the time troubled to frame the conflict in religious terms, or to group the Debre Libanos monks with the other Christian martyrs being widely mourned at this same time in the Soviet Union, Spain, and Mexico.

That silence about the religious dimension speaks volumes about the general failure to appreciate the strength or antiquity of Christianity in Ethiopia—or to imagine that the faith could exist in any authentic form outside the Euro-American world. In that age, African Christians of any denomination were curious and anomalous figures, scarcely to be taken seriously.

By far the most globally minded Christian body was, of course, the Roman Catholic Church, and it was absolutely not going to sympathize with the Ethiopians. The Vatican at this time had good (if not

uncritical) relations with Mussolini's regime, and the Italian church passionately favored the war effort in Ethiopia as a manifestation of revived national pride. Some prelates spoke glowingly of the rich opportunities to convert Ethiopian Christians to the Catholic form of the faith. For many Italian Catholics, Graziani's war was nothing short of a modern-day crusade. In 1939, the brilliant fascist propaganda film *Abuna Messias* depicted the plots of sinister Ethiopian clerics against 19th-century Italian Catholic missionaries in the region.

At the time, those obscure African Christians had very few supporters anywhere in the world. One glowing exception was among African Americans, who struggled to show solidarity with Ethiopia's native resistance. But the general lack of attention was reflected in the failure to punish Italian perpetrators after World War II, not even the monster Graziani. A court accepted his defense that he had been obeying orders, and he died a free man in 1955. Nobody seemed to care about those Ethiopian martyrs.

Today, new global conditions must affect our view of past events. A global church must have a global memory. Let's never forget Debre Libanos.

Philip Jenkins's Notes from the Global Church appears in every other issue.

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Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church in midtown Manhattan seeks an **ASSOCIATE PASTOR** to help lead our growing, inclusive, arts-loving, mission-minded congregation. Our new associate pastor will provide leadership, expertise, and nurture in family ministries and young adult ministries. We are looking for a smart, skilled individual who has a passion for Christ's Church, a sense of humor, and a yearning to do ministry in a diverse, fast-paced urban setting. Learn more about this opportunity at www.fapc.org/apnc. When you're ready to apply, e-mail Nancy Moore, chair of the Associate Pastor Nominating Committee (apnc@fapc.org) with your cover letter, résumé, PIF, and statement of faith.

PASTOR/HEAD OF STAFF—For over 140 years Huguenot Memorial Church has been a vitalizing agent in our community suburb of NYC. We are seeking a dynamic and vibrant pastor who will encourage our congregation to grow in all ways. Go to www.huguenotchurch.org/ministry-information-form or contact us: pachuguenotmemorial@gmail.com.

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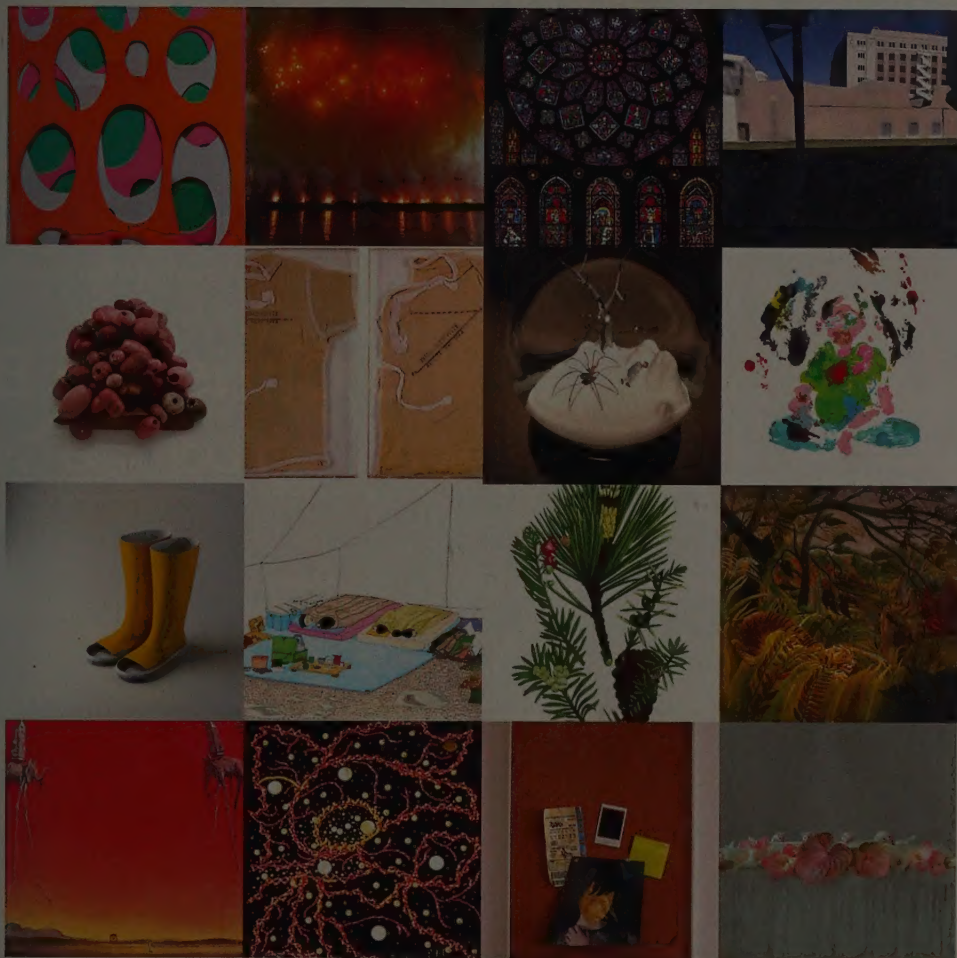
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Gospel Feelings (gospelfeelings.com)

Since its inception in 2014, gospelfeelings.com has offered weekly multimedia engagements with Gospel readings from the Revised Common Lectionary. On any given week, a visitor will find a dynamic bridge to the liturgy through the poetry of Audre Lorde, Allen Ginsberg, or William Temple; prayers taken from the Melanesian Mission or from Steven Shakespeare (*Prayers for an Inclusive Church*); the art of Henri Rousseau and Marlene Dumas; musical reflections from rapper M.I.A.; newgrass jam from Infamous Stringdusters; or performances by the Boston Pops Orchestra.

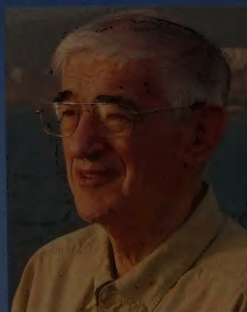
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Tuesday / Original sin:
Sexual temptation or escalatory violence?

Wednesday / Covenantal law:
Human destiny or divine sanction?

Thursday / God's kingdom:
Violent revolt or nonviolent resistance?

Friday / Christianity's criterion:
Historical Jesus or apocalyptic Jesus?

John Dominic Crossan is generally regarded as the leading historical Jesus scholar in the world. Educated in Ireland and the United States, he taught at DePaul University in Chicago from 1969 to 1995 and is now professor emeritus in the religious studies department. His best-selling books include *The Historical Jesus*, *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography*, *The Birth of Christianity*, and *Who Killed Jesus?*

**For more information go
to wichurches.org and
look under "events."
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